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# LITTLE WHITE LIES


*Truth & Movies*

THE  
KICK-  
ASS  
ISSUE!

JOHN  
ROMITA  
JR.  
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**"AT SOME  
POINT IN OUR  
LIVES, WE  
ALL WANTED  
TO BE A  
SUPERHERO."**



**...CHAPTER ONE  
IN WHICH WE  
DISCUSS  
KICK-ASS**

*MATTHEW VAUGHN KICKS OFF THE ERA OF  
THE INDIE SUPERHERO IN FIZZING FASHION.*

**THE FIVE** *Indie Superhero*  
**MOVIES** *That Defined*  
*the Genre*

**THE FIVE**  
**MOVIES**



**WITH ITS BUBBLEGUM  
COLOURS, ITS  
KNOWING WIT AND  
PULSING SOUNDTRACK,  
KICK-ASS IS  
VAUGHN'S ANSWER  
TO THE PONDEROUS  
MYTHOLOGY OF THE  
MODERN SUPERHERO.**

It wasn't a dying planet that created the superhero. It was rage and frustration, displacement and anger, indignity and loss. The comic book was a fortress of solitude, but *Elvis* (and, not Krypton) was its spiritual home: the gateway to America for a generation of immigrants whose sons would measure themselves in the armpit and capes of extraordinary men.

But panel by panel, hero by hero, movie by movie, the fantasy of power has become a reality for the comic book industry. In the last decade as its mission has been fuelled by the super serums of box office dollars, those artists and writers who imagined the world of tomorrow have been replaced by studio executives fixated on today.

They have given us the Golden Age of comic-book adaptations, but the legacy franchise of Marvel and DC are no longer the creative engine of the comic-book community. Independent comics have emerged, providing a platform for characters and ideas unmoored from the mainstream. Slowly, both the publishers and the film studios have come to realize that there is an appetite for comic-book cinema beyond the consensus consider. But the superhero remains the preserve of the big-budget blockbuster. Like the characters themselves, the independent superhero movie contained a fragment of the imagination – an impossibility. Until now.

Because writer Mark Millar and director Matthew Vaughn have combined to create a film that breaks the rules. A superhero movie conceived outside the studio system and independently financed to the tune of \$70 million. A comic-book adaptation that's both deadly serious and light of touch. An inventive, destructive, severely psychotic movie that gets being, very, very wrong in very, very right. And it, too, has a secret identity hidden within the blood, the violence, the bullet smoke and broken bones is the most intensely enjoyable superhero movie you'll ever see.

*Kick-Ass* is rebuke, apocryph, satire and love-letter rolled into one. With its bubblegum colours, its knowing wit and pulsing soundtrack, this is Vaughn's answer to the ponderous mythology of the modern superhero. *Kick-Ass* may self-consciously evoke classic comic-book archetypes, but in cranking up the sex and violence, and smug down the self-importance, Vaughn has avoided the vague for 'reality' embodied by *Watchmen* and *The Dark Knight*, and recreated the spirit of pure adolescent delight that comics at their best redeliver.





Dave Lauswell (Aaron Johnson) is an ordinary kid at an American high school whose only super power is being unable to long time craft Kate Deauville (Gaby Porteous). Along with best friends Todd (Evan Parment) and Merry (Clark Duke), Dave's life revolves around comics and videogames. But Dave has grand ambitions - when he's not vigorously peeing off to his well-endowed English teacher, Mr. Zerk. In the course of becoming a superhero. All it takes, he says, is the perfect mixture of bravery and audacity. One bright green sweater with gold trim later, a legend is born.

With the advice of his unsuspecting friends ringing in his own ("Dude, if anybody did it in real life, they'd get their ass kicked"), Kick-Ass hits the streets. But after a back alley showdown with a pair of thugs, it quickly becomes clear to both Lauswell and the audience that we're not in Smallville anymore.

Nor is Kick-Ass the only masked avenger in town. Contained nuisance Big Daddy (Nicolas Cage) and his daughter Hit Girl (Chloe Moretz) are jacking the shipments of drug trigger Frank D'Amico (Mark Strong)

As the 'heroes' patina craves in an increasingly crowded New York City, D'Amico and his troubled son Chris (Christopher Moltisano) prepare to send their own message to the costumed community.

Beginning with a transporter riff that evokes John Williams' legendary Superman theme, only to segue into the horrible crash landing of an American exchange plane, the film's pro-anarchy sequence perfectly captures a tone of myth-bitch banter that reaches a fine line between the old and the new, the reported and the unpredictable.

Kick-Ass is indebted to the comic-book clichés that allow Vaughn to sketch out his characters in cinematic shorthand. His situations-to-class superheroes (Superman, Peter Parker, Big Daddy's enforcer Bottoms) costume Lauswell's own passion to an X-ray of his re-engineered body ("Dude, I look like Spider-Man!"). It tells us everything we need to know about our protagonists' self-perception. They're also a mark of the film's confidence: Vaughn has seen the same superhero movies as we do, shares our expectations, and he knows how to subvert them.

But for all that the film may be built on comic-book conventions, there's never been an adaptation that feels quite like it. Kick-Ass certainly isn't the first post-modern superhero, but as a product of MySpace and YouTube rather than The Daily Planet or Bugle, he is an original web finger. Just like the comic itself, which Miller launched with a series of fake social networking pages and screen videos, Kick-Ass is an online phenomenon, a viral average, a hero for the reality TV age.

The real and the unreal are here engaged as never before, resulting in a superhero who truly feels like an Everyman. Seen (perhaps especially) when in costume, Kick-Ass evokes the inadequacies of these original comic-book icons. Unlike traditional heroes, this costume is Dave Lauswell's secret identity - and if he doesn't realize that at the start of his journey, it's made brutally clear to him by the end.

What Vaughn captures in a way no other comic-book director can is a chilling reality in the nature and consequences of Lauswell's heroism. Superman, Spider-Man and Batman may suffer on screen, but it's a distant -

outcast. For Bottoms in a room full of drug dealers and you find a meeting opportunity for the bad guys. But when Kick-Ass is faced with the same dilemma, and the drug dealers are armed to the teeth, the danger to his life is real, the fear palpable. Kick-Ass chillingly shares the same of small-town hero for so long, smothered (the superhero).

And that is the point. Without this danger, Kick-Ass' heroism would be an illusion. "I got responsibility only comes with great power, what does that say about the rest of us?" he asks, bloodied and broken after a beating from D'Amico's goons. In comic books, the bylaws are supposed to wait around until the hero shows up, but Kick-Ass is both bylawer and hero killed on one.

If only they'd had the courage to keep it that way. But the film ultimately defies its own logic. It desperately wants to play by real-world rules, but happily breaks them whenever the narrative demands. By the finale, Kick-Ass has become both bolder and blinder - more traditionally heroic, and consequently less human. **B+**





# IF KICK-ASS HAS YOU PUMPED FOR MORE MASKED MISADVENTURES, TRY THESE ALTERNATIVE COMIC-BOOK CLASSICS...



## BARBARELLA (1968)

**WRITTEN BY** [John Hayes](#)

Pages and pages of post-feminist theory have been devoted to the existence (or absence) of everything comic-book heroines. How many of them were created by Jean-Claude Forest's ultimate symbol of sexual liberation (and subversion), *Barbarella*? First created in *France's V Magazine* in 1960, Forest's sensuous, sci-fi-influenced figure quickly achieved her way across the cosmos. Barbarella's iconic husband, Roger Vadim, staged a perfectly timed adaptation in 1968, but this capturing the body-consciousness of a burgeoning revolution. Jean Forest's "re-invention" is much paler herself — see cast, in the lead, performing a similar name surprise that "hickily assimilated" into the cultural mythology of a generation.



## DARKMAN (1990)

**WRITTEN BY** [John Sayles](#)

Yes, *Darkman*. It might not be an adaptation of an existing comic-book, but it is. Robert Rodriguez's interpretation of his own short story may just be the most important superhero movie ever made. Back in the '80s, Sayles (and) was a low-budget filmmaker obsessed with adapting William B. Yeats's creation *The Shadow*. Unable to find anybody to trust him with the project, Sayles turned to *Darkman* — the story of a young scientist, Peyton Westlake, determined to take revenge on the mobsters who screwed him for life. They submit pulp-magazine-style serial-killers to his endgame, but the film was a modest hit at the box office, but it passed the director's passion into the world of film-makers. A decade later, *Barbie* was back in the ring as *Spider-Man*, and the twenty-first century's comic-book boom was born.



## THE ROCKETEER (1991)

**WRITTEN BY** [John Sayles](#)

"You'll Believe a Man Can Fly!" promised the poster for Richard Donner's 1978 *Superman*. But whether you believed it or not was making the point. *Superman* isn't a man, he's an alien whose powers will forever be beyond our reach. For the purposes of joy, of escapism, of relief, let's take. Rather than Joe Johnston's *The Rocketeer* (emerging at a time when comic-book adaptations were still second-rate affairs, *The Rocketeer* was obviously undersold on release. But here is a film that strikingly recreates the nostalgia of a bygone age, transporting the temples of pulp fiction's golden age back on all singing celebration of our power to transcend the ordinary.



## GHOST WORLD (2001)

**WRITTEN BY** [Bruce Laikins](#)

Although it would be another year until *Spider-Man* poured considerably less love on comic-book the appetite for comic-book films, both *Spider-Man* and the nascent *Rocky* franchise had suggested that these cinematic rules to be made-for-TV. *Ghost World* (Stacy Papp and some classic, indie-oriented heroes. But it was 2001's *Ghost World* that offered a vision of how wide-reaching the phenomenon might be. This material adaptation of Daniel Clowes' graphic novel became a cult classic for its edgy and nihilistic tone, but it more enduring legacy was its broadening the horizons of the filmmaking community, revealing to them the diverse world of comic-book. In the meantime, over the next few years, *Deadpool*, *Ant-Man*, *Spider-Man*, *A Theory of Women*, and *Iron Man* would all join *Ghost World* as an alternative vision of the comic-book genre.



## SPECIAL (2006)

**WRITTEN BY** [John Sayles](#) and [John Sayles](#)

Reinvented very little before back in 1990, *Special* represented the directorial debut of Bill Haderman, and Jeremy Shamos, two writers who emerged from the pages of the independent scene to take a shot at the big screen. *Special* was an intriguing proposition, starring Michael Rapaport as a man whose whose experience meditation and meditation but he has superpowers powers. Although a mix of parody and social satire, *Special* was indeed not the first time an existing (though it was independent drama, with quirky elements and a lot of funny, surprising the drama. It may not have generated sufficient attention to re-invent the genre, but there are moments to be had if you can pick it down.



*My Prerogative* (1986). The extended mix. Remember it? Not a track you'd expect on a corporate video, particularly one that launches a new shade of adhesive carpet. With 74 radial wipe transitions. But then that shade was *Really Brown*.

"A creative *four-de force*," Simone will tell you.

You see, Simone is a film director. Ignore, for now, that her business card reads *Marketing Executive*. Her real? Well, it consists of various "motion pictures" lovingly crafted for her carpet tile firm, each one special in its own right.

## "My gonzo health and safety video came first,"

she reflects. "Agnes from finance filmed it by chance, at the company away day in Swindon." The star? Simone herself, who "got so tipsy" she fell out of the sixteen window.

But she bravely recovered to use the footage in an instructional film, entitled *Climbing the Corporate Ladder: Dos and Don'ts*.

Next was a tender insight into imported shag. Simone cleverly edited the product catalogue with footage of seagulls from a weekend break in Sogness. Her boss particularly loved this (perhaps because he was there at the time).

Soon she would also begin to appear in cheeky cameo roles. If you check out the video of last year's ASM, Simone waxes to camera about fifteen minutes in (she's in the third row). Not that anyone has watched it that far. Still, it's well funny apparently, and the tripod wanted a treat.

Simone's latest project is a company viral. "It's a startling idea. We'll sing the lyrics to this Craig David song, while sitting at our desks – as if it's a music video!" Sounds pretty sweet. But with this little baby almost out the door, she has been searching for a fresh new directorial challenge.

Until now.

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Superheroes turned anxiety into joy. As the world plunged into conflict and disaster almost too huge to comprehend, they grabbed their readers' darkest feelings and banded into the sky with them. They made violence and wreckage exciting but at the same time small and controllable. So the ironic, childish, unreal and absurd were those goings-on tight that no reader had to feel he was really engaging with his own angry fantasies. Superman was less a fantasy self than a god out of the machine – a sudden flash-of-colour resolution to conflicts too terrible to think about. The superheroes were slapstick comedians in a vaudeville of holocaust.

Gerard Jones, *The Men of Tomorrow*



## **...CHAPTER TWO IN WHICH WE INTRODUCE OURSELVES**

LMGiles:

What is it you love about movies?

Aspen Johnson:

Um... Something that, you know, what I love about movies is how it can take you into a whole other world. I like getting lost into a movie and feel like all my senses are working, you know? I feel like what I'm seeing... I want to see something that's really beautifully shot, visual, artistic. And then I want to be hearing, you know, great actors and just feeling like I'm in the scene with them. I like being taken on a journey and feeling a part of something that's just intimate and special. Like you're being carried away by this movie.

Matthew Vaughn:

When they're good - everything. I love the fact that you escape... Humans have always loved being told stories, whether it's 'Beowulf' to Chaucer to now. All I know is that when I saw 'Star Wars' at seven-years-old I was just taken to another place. I was seven or eight when I really fell in love with movies, and it was a combination of 'Star Wars' and 'Raiders of the Lost Ark' where the foundations were built. And every couple of years my love gets stronger, whether it's in the '80s as a teenager watching 'Beverly Hills Cop' and 'Scarface' and the 'Godfather'... Like, in a weird way, I think films for me have always... Every year there's a special, special movie that wins my heart more than any other culture!... I mean, for example, there hasn't been a new bond that's blown me away for ages but there have been new movies. I just love the whole experience. I think film is a very powerful way of spending two hours of your life.



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# CREATIVE BRIEF: KICK-ASS

For our third Creative Brief, **LINEUP** throw down the gauntlet to the five-loving indie comics community. The challenge was to redraw a favourite film within the parameters of a six-panel comic strip. We received almost 400 entries, displaying an incredible breadth of wit, talent and imagination.

The winner, as chosen by **Kick-Ass** artist and illustrator of the movie's cover, John Romita Jr., is David Rigby for his interpretation of *Zombieland*. You can check out all the runners-up in a special digital edition available for free on the website from March 5.



**RUNNER-UP TOTAL RECALL** BY MATT BOYCE



**RUNNER-UP ZETTER** BY MAT BONE



**...CHAPTER THREE  
IN WHICH WE  
DISCUSS  
THEMES OF  
UNCOMMON INTEREST  
INSPIRED BY  
OUR FEATURE FILM**

A large, vibrant pink splatter graphic originates from the top right corner and streaks diagonally across the page, passing through the text.

# WE COULD BE HEROES

LWLIES UNMASKS THE MAJOR PLAYERS IN THE NEW COMIC-BOOK REVIVAL.

# THE LIMITS OF CONTROL



SO YOU THINK YOU WANT TO BE A MOVIE STAR? AARON JOHNSON DOESN'T SEEM SO SURE



**F** anything about stardom, you think it's going to make everything easier, but it has a habit of working out the other way. Six months ago, Aaron Johnson was just another young actor, one of a clutch of new British stars tipped for the big time but with everything to prove. Sure, he made an impression in *Angus, Thorge and Perfect Snogging*, but that was just teenage carny games – the first small step on a long, hard road.

Back then an audience with Aaron was pretty easy to arrange. A couple of phone calls and he was all yours, alone in an East London bar, posing moodily for pictures. Today, there are different

In December, November Day proved that Johnson could cut it as a leading man. In youthful John Lennon lighting up the grey streets of post-war Liverpool. It that film cemented his reputation. *Kick-Ass* is going to need things of kinds of energy. This is Johnson's *X-Men* – the one that's going to lift him out of the trenches and put his face in front of a million movie fans.

Suddenly the game has changed. If you want to track Aaron Johnson down, a couple of phone calls are no longer enough. He's in New York, no, Sundance, no, London. You want him, you wait for him. And this time there'll be no East London bar, instead, it's the West London office of his personal publicists – home territory, safe ground. You want pictures? Well, you'd better be prepared to sign over the rights. No dice? No deal.

If celebrity means losing control of your life, stardom is the means to regain it. And Johnson has more to regret than most. Since his romance with film director Sam Taylor-Wood became public property, his private life has been splashed across the tabloids. "Top boy!" "Engaged!" "Pregnant!" screamed the headlines. Perhaps it's no surprise that Sean Johnson is so eager to assert control over this new stage of his life.



And yet the 19-year-old at the centre of it all is unfazed. "I don't really follow what goes on in the papers or even film industry news because whether it's a good one or not there'll be that one sentence that will stick in your mind," he says. "I've got a lot of friends who I've seen it affect in ways that I find it weird to keep away. You just want to do life the way you want to do it – not by how anyone else thinks you should."

Then, he says, it's what's allowed him to return from the Sundance Film Festival (lunchin with Harvey Weinstein and all) with his feet still firmly on the ground. "It's all pretty heightened stuff and overwhelming, but I don't go over there to network or anything like that. The best thing to do is just be yourself [and] you don't get caught up in people blowing smoke up your arse. At the end of the day you just want to go home and put your feet on the ground – be grounded and pulled back and be humble."

Johnson's home – an £11 million, eight-bedroom townhouse that he shares with his new family – doesn't actually sound all that humble, but in person he cuts a deliberately ordinary figure. A chunky right ring and puffed sleeves hint at newfound affluence, but there's nothing of the brash movie star in the way Johnson presents himself. He exudes a tacit energy, edginess, reflexes, a mixture of keen intellectuality and actorly self-analysis delivered in a weary, estuary accent.

Despite the big house, the rich friends and budding stardom, it's the commitment to academics that makes Johnson so ringgold. "I've never been a fan of *Business*," he says. "I come from a well-grounded background – you look after your family, you're respectful, you're humble. If I ever spoke out in an arrogant way I would have got a kicking (a lap around the ear hole. I don't need flash cars. It's not in my interests. And money doesn't mean a fucking thing to me."

Ah, youthful conceit. The only people who don't give a shit about money tend to be those who've got plenty of it. But it's true to say that Johnson has got other priorities right now. "I've got a baby on the way and that's just going to be wonderful, the most exciting time in my life, you know, the day I become a dad. I dream about it," he says.

But how will he square the demands of a blossoming career with the daily grind of being a father? Well, not sure how to be compromised for the other? "Probably," he acknowledges, "but I don't get worried career-wise. I've got a beautiful family and I care more about that than the career. And for me as well, as an actor, you don't really let your prime life be about 30 or 40 anyway. It's 10 years away from all that, so it doesn't factor in."

That's a change of tone from the last time we spoke to him. Last year Johnson told us, "I'll keep fighting any way I can to do what I want to do." Reminded of that, he admits that his perspective has changed. "I guess then I was a bit more independently career motivated or just naturally moving forward in life," he says. "With acting and going from job to job you're almost going to a different territory and now that I've got my family we either make together or work as just work. It's different – you've got to find something that you're really, really passionate about and want to put six months of your life into."



Even if *Kick-Ass* is Johnson's intended breakthrough, don't expect to see him anywhere at all a sudden. "If *Kick-Ass* puts me in a position where more work's available then, yeah, that's a new position to be in," he agrees. "But you want to be careful about what you choose next to keep your career path going and not burn out. That's very important because you see some actors the new hot shit thing and they just keep doing other crap until no one gives a fuck. It's not really scared of that. It's pretty tedious, which is why I like doing different roles and different things."



UP UNTIL NOW, I WOULDN'T  
HAVE SAID **I'M AN ACTOR**. I  
WOULDN'T EVER FUCKING MENTION  
IT BECAUSE PEOPLE HAVE IDEAS OF  
WHAT ACTORS ARE LIKE. WHEN YOU  
SAY THAT, YOU'RE PUTTING YOURSELF  
IN A CLUB LIKE, "WHAT DO YOU DO?"  
"WELL, I'M A GUNT"



# "KICK-ASS MIGHT OPEN A LOAD OF DOORS, BUT WHAT'S BEHIND THOSE DOORS MIGHT BE UTTER SHIT. I CAN'T JUST GRAB IT BECAUSE I'VE GOT AN OPPORTUNITY."

"But the light doesn't just die down," he continues. "You always keep fighting. The best jobs are the ones that are worth fighting for. Kick-Ass might open a load of doors, but what's behind those doors might be utter shit. I can't just grab it because I've got an opportunity. You've got to be pretty patient to wait for something that you feel in your gut and your instincts that you want to do. And you've got to prove yourself constantly."

Patience and versatility are the key traits of Johnson's career to date. After *Angus*, it would have been easy for him to cultivate a pretty boy persona and cash in on the slew of high-school films that followed. But that isn't his style. Where many young actors are consciously trying to develop a singular onscreen personality, Johnson has gone the other way, happy to hide his real face behind John Lennon's glasses or Dave Laszlo's greasy hair. His inspiration, he says, is someone like *Greg Kinnear*. "Because I never fucking spot him in a movie. I want to find something very different each time, something that I can create that's different so you don't get bored or recognized."

That doesn't mean that he always gets his own way. "In Kick-Ass I wanted to be blond because in the original comic books the young lad has big, curly blond hair. But Matthew [Knigh] didn't even want me to have glasses on, he wouldn't fucking let me have blond hair," Johnson remembers. "His argument was, 'Did you ever see Alessandro?' I was like, 'Yeah.' He was like, 'I'm not going to have the same fucking mistake as Colin Farrell—that cunt with his blond hair.'"

Johnson didn't prove the point. Why bother? At the time, they didn't even know if anybody would get to see the finished film. "I didn't realize that it would get to this point where it's got a lot of hype and a lot of people are raving about it because it was an independent movie," he says. "Matthew kept saying that this was going to be a really big budget fucking home video because we ain't got a distributor so it might not even make it to theaters."



Johnson got his first break as a child actor on stage. He traces his personal watershed back to a West End production of *Macbeth* when he was only eight-years-old. Playing Macduff's murdered son, the scene called for the young Johnson to be drowned in a bath, and he spent most of his time on stage naked, something that he remembers vividly today. "I come on stage in a towel and I take the towel off but we weren't allowed to wear Speedos or anything like that. I was just biker's naked and getting into a bath. You couldn't even have anything like that [now]—an eight-year-old kid naked on stage in the West End? It'd be fuckin' madness."

One particular night, "I wasn't quite thinking properly. I went straight back to the top of the scene [after leaving it] and went through it again. But the mother rolled it through and carried on. That was the first time I'd ever noticed that I'd fucked up, and it was on stage. Probably no one noticed but that was a huge deal to me and I was

only eight," he recalls. "After the scene I came off and I was in tears, then I went back to the cast and apologized for messing up. I guess from then on, I realized that I was striving for perfection. I wanted to perfect my performance and make sure I did it right and not fuck up."

And yet, over a decade later, Johnson is still ambivalent about labeling himself an "actor." "Up until now I probably wouldn't have said that I'm an actor," he admits. "If someone said to me, 'What do you do?' I wouldn't ever fucking mention it because, I don't know, I think because when I grew up at school nobody used to talk about it. It just wouldn't go down well, would it? So I would never have really admitted that I was an actor. Even now I'm hesitant to say it because people have that idea of what actors are like—'funny' and people that I don't want to be associated with. So when you say that, you're almost putting yourself in a club. Like, 'Hey, I'm a dickhead.' Basically, 'What do you do?' Well, I'm a cunt."

It's something that Johnson is going to have to come to terms with. Or maybe not. After *Kick-Ass*, people will probably stop asking the questions. After *Kick-Ass*, they won't need to anymore. They'll just know. But then how will that work out for the actor who never wants to be recognized? But that's a standard for you. Just a whole new set of problems. ●

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WORDS BY  
JOHN DUNNING

# OUT OF THE SHADOWS


*NEIL GAIMAN AND DAVE MCKEAN ON THE COMIC-BOOK CREATORS STEPPING INTO THE DIRECTOR'S CHAIR AND TAKING ON HOLLYWOOD AT ITS OWN GAME.*

**T**he history of comic-booker in film is a surprisingly short and often unhappy one considering their apparent similarities. In the '60s, underground comics artist Robert Crumb was enjoying unprecedented success, outselling many of his mainstream counterparts. When an adaptation of his *Fritz The Cat* was brought to the big screen in 1972 it was a smash hit, but it also became something of a blueprint for many future relationships between comic-book creators and their filmmaking counterparts.

Crumb disavowed any connection to the film, and upon its release he famously had the last laugh by brutally killing Fritz (with an ice pick to the head) in a story entitled *Fritz The Cat Supercat*.

The Dark Santa of Letters, Alan Moore, is another whose history with Hollywood is an unhappy one. Having blazed a trail in the American comics industry, taking long-defunct DC characters like *The Swamp Thing* and building them into complex narratives, he was unleashed on the company's bigger brands, crippling *Batman* in *The Killing Joke* amongst other boys. 





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pranks. He soon produced his masterpiece, *Watchmen*, an acidic but poignant deconstruction of superhero archetypes. It was quickly optioned and after decades of development hell was faithfully adapted by Zack Snyder. A happy ending? Hardly.

Moore has seen a number of his works appear on screen. After a lukewarm reception for *From Hell* in 2001, and a dismal one for 2005's *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen*, the stage was set for things to go spectacularly wrong when, in 2006, the Wachowski brothers decided to adapt *V For Vendetta* with long-time collaborator James McTeigue.

Although the first product stuck closely to the original text and the film performed at the box office, Moore had reached his limit. In a very public fallout with the filmmakers, he took his name off the credits and refused to accept any profit generated by the film, repeating the trick with *Watchmen* four years later.

As *Watchmen* co-creator Dave Gibbons admitted at the time, "Alan has had some very bad experiences with Hollywood and made his mind up that he didn't want to have anything further to do with it. His problems with Hollywood have nothing to do with this production. He has said he doesn't want his name on it and he doesn't want any money from it, which of course is rather baffling to Hollywood (because Hollywood is all about credit and cash). But as Alan said to me, he does often think about the reason is Hollywood, and quite frankly you can't buy entertainment like that."

In the wake of Moore's estrangement (an explanation, depending on your point of view), other comic-book creators are taking a radically new approach to Hollywood, parlaying their publishing power into a berth as the director's chair.

Ned Gorman, writer of *The Sandman* comic series as well as hugely successful books including *Starlord*, *Conclave*, and *American Gods*, is at the center of the cross-pollination between comics and cinema. His first directorial project, an adaptation of his own comic, *Deadly: The High Cost of Living*, is slated for release in 2011. "The one thing that I have really learned over the last decade," he says, "is that film, and to some extent television, is a director's medium. When you write comics or a novel you have control. Everything that happens does so because you want it to, whereas in a movie, as a writer, you don't have any control. You have input and you give suggestions."

Some of the most remunerative comic-to-film adaptations have come from the pen of comic-book creator Frank Miller. No sooner had audiences recovered from the relentless visual onslaught of *Sin City* in 2005 than they were presented with 350 the following year, both from Miller's imagination. Not content with these blockbuster incursions into the film world, Miller then directed the big screen adaptation of Will Eisner's classic Golden Age comic *The Spirit* in 2008 — with dispiriting results. Like his primed work, the film lacked both the seamless quality and astonishing rawness of the medium's greatest artists.

About Miller's film adaptations, Gorman says, "While on the one hand I appreciated the *Sin City* film, at it made me think how much I liked the comic. I'm not sure I saw the point in adapting it. It was an attempt to produce the particular characters that Miller explores in the comic. The problem you run into is that you are privileging film in some way by saying that a comic is worthwhile when it is adapted as a film, that the film is just like the comic material — only it moves. I don't agree."

Comics are more than storyboards for films, or just films without movement. They are an entirely different form with laws and possibilities all of their own. "There is so much less correlation between comics and film than most people imagine," agrees Gorman. "The huge advantage that comics have with regards to film is that they are a visual medium, which is incredibly useful given that most studio executives have no visual imagination. Even turning a script into a film in your head is incredibly difficult,

let alone turning it into the film that will actually be made. I don't think anyone handed the original script of *Sin City* and would have read it and said that it was going to change the world. Handing someone a comic allows them to get the idea quickly."

Dave McKean, comic artist (Archie's *Archie*), illustrator (*Sawyer*), *Garman* collaborator (*The Sandman*, *Sigil*), *To Write, Violet* (Cassie, *Devotion*) and film director (*Moodindigo*) is also at the center of this debate. "Sound in film is probably the biggest difference," he says. "Comics are more like radio: the reader fills in the blanks and interacts with the medium, whereas film gives you everything, a total flavor of life. But really, none of this is very important — the need for good, interesting characters and stories, and trying to use the medium in original ways, are the priorities of both forms. Comics are not defined by genre," he continues. "Superheroes are not a medium; they are a genre, although a pretty dominant one. When people criticize bad films as being 'comic-bookish,' what they should say is 'bad comic books.' There are plenty of subtle comics that are about real life and emotions, not men in tights."

The other advantage deals between the film and comic-book industries, and the creators who work in them, is money. Film can rely on a huge amount of money to get made, and so end up being run by conservative Comics have the freedom to portray stories without budget restraints, and because of the relatively small number of people actually involved in the process, the work retains a far greater degree of the creator's voice. But as technology catches up with engraving the gap begins to narrow.

McKean concurs, saying, "The worst part of filmmaking is it's just so bloody expensive. You are totally beholden to other people: producers, production companies, funding bodies. If I think of a great comic, I can start it tomorrow and it will be published. If I think of a great film, I have to spend months or years doing lunch, pitching it and generally not actually working. It'd like to find a way to make films completely independently."

Gorman adds, "When I was on the set of *Conclave*, the film's director Henry Seidel showed me the 150,000-foot studio where they were building the sets. Everything that the cinema sees has to be made. It cost millions and millions and there were hundreds and hundreds of people working very hard, and I had to say, 'When I wrote *Conclave*, if you include the cost of the ink and the cost of the paperback I wrote it in, and if you feel really wild and want to add it all in the way that I think you want up maybe 30 quid.' So the idea of spending literally a million times that to make it into a movie suited me with quid."

In fact, comic-books provide a home for a necessary stream of creativity — released from the financial pressures of the film world and the critical restrictions of the literary establishment, ideas are free to run riot. Thus the interest by the art world in comics is welcomed only guardedly by their creators.

On the eve of the release of the feature adaptation of *Ghost World* in 2001, writer-artist Dan Clowes summed up the ambivalence, saying, "On one hand I think that comics can be as good as any other form of narrative. I think it's easy to say that it's an inherently inferior art form just because there haven't been as great things done in it as in other forms. Then again, it's always tough to champion that trick because I think one of the beauties of comics is that they're below that critical radar. It means that one doesn't have to feel the pressure of having to completely create 'great works of art.' There's a beauty in their cheap, irreproachable history."

Here's to keeping it cheap. ☺

John Harris is the author of comic-book *Salon Experiments*, available at all good book shops now.

[www.makerecord.com](http://www.makerecord.com)

# COMICS

WORDS BY  
PAUL SLADE

# RAMBLA

THE COMIC INDUSTRY'S ICONIC HEROES HAVE FOUGHT MANY TITANIC BATTLES BUT NONE HAVE BEEN AS PROTRACTED, PERSONAL OR IMPORTANT AS THE COPYRIGHT STRUGGLE UNFOLDING IN US COURTS WITH THE OWNERSHIP OF EVERYTHING FROM SUPERMAN TO SPIDEY UP FOR GRABS. LWLIES UNTANGLES THE LEGAL TRAVAILS AND EXAMINES THE POTENTIAL IMPACT ON THE FUTURE OF THE COMIC-BOOK BLOCKBUSTER.







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THEN LATHAM, THE GRIM PROSECUTOR OF LEXOR, MAKES HIS OPENING STATEMENT...

THE PROSECUTION WILL DEMAND THE DEATH PENALTY FOR WE'LL PROVE THAT THE ACCUSED, SUPERMAN OF EARTH, CAME TO THIS PLANET WITH THE DELIBERATE INTENTION OF COMMITTING MURDER!

NOT TRUE! YOU'RE MY DEFENSE LAWYERS. WHY DON'T YOU OBJECT?



SUPERMAN'S DEFENDERS, VEL QUINNAR AND HIS YOUNG DAUGHTER, GARN AND, REFUSE!

QUIET! I CAN'T OBJECT TO THE FORMAL CHARGE. IT'LL BE UP TO US TO DISPROVE IT, IF WE CAN!

THEY DIDN'T WANT TO DEFEND ME, BUT WE'RE CHOSEN BY THE COURT TO DO SO... I FEEL THEY'RE CONVINCED I'M GUILTY!



IT ALL SEEMS LIKE A NIGHTMARE! IT WAS SUCH A SHORT TIME AGO IT ALL BEGAN, WHEN LATHAM BROKE OUT OF PRISON ON EARTH...





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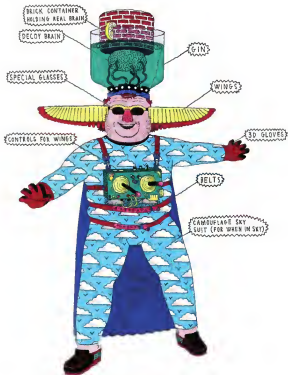
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# SPECTACULOR



BY JIM STOTEN

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MAY APPEAR AT FIRST GLANCE  
TO BE A TREE

CAPTAIN BIRD EYES  
HAS TURNED HIS FACE  
INTO A PLANTAIN BUSH

SOME SAY HE HAS  
A PSYCHIC LINK  
WITH THE BIRDS  
AND SEES THROUGH  
THEIR EYES

YES HE RIDES A MAGIC LION

THEY SAY WHO, NO LONDON  
SLE UP YOUR GARDEN  
LIONS HAVE TO EAT TOO!



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BYRONIA KNOW  
IT'S 2000 LION LION  
A BIRD EYES LION  
CAPTAIN BIRD EYES  
CAPTAIN BIRD EYES  
LONDON IN 2000 LION  
New York in 2000

BY JON BOAM

All  
Failing

Рассуждая

超能力  
**NOROVIRUS™**  
W-Y-D

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SPORES

EXPLANATION  
BOWELS  
PULPITIS ETC.

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## SOLID GASES (MERLE)

STOMACH  
CONTENTS

TRAILS  
OF DISASTER  
~~AND DISASTERS~~

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\* PURGES ALL  
(Scrutin 'N' sniffs)

**AQ.**

BY AUSTIN FROM NEW



# THE REGURGITATOR

APPLE JACKS'  
NOM NOM  
SAUSAGE

PURE  
POWER STEEZ

DYING  
BIRD

GETTING  
REVIVED BY  
DELICIOUS  
SICK

A  
LONG  
~~KNIFE~~

WARM  
EDIBLE  
SICK

POWERFUL  
BECAUSE HE'S WELL HARD

CROTCH = RAINBOW  
100% CRUCIAL POP  
GETTING THE JOB  
DONE WITH  
FLARE ACENESS  
ACES RAD  
ACENESS

BUNS OF STEEL

AT LEAST  
5 **FIVE** MORE BIRDS WOULD KICK IT  
EVERY YEAR IF IT WEREN'T FOR

BIRD DOG

BY AMY BROWN

# MOST HONORABLE KING LIZARD MAN



BY MATT TAYLOR



# KICKING HOLLYWOOD'S ASS

WORDS BY  
MARK MILLAR

REPORTING BY  
JONATHAN CROCKER

AFTER *WANTED* AND *KICK-ASS*, MARK MILLAR IS NOW THE HOTTEST COMIC-BOOK WRITER IN HOLLYWOOD. HE WRITES EXCLUSIVELY FOR *LWLIES* WITH THE INSIDE STORY ON THE WORLD'S FIRST INDIE SUPERHERO BLOCKBUSTER



It's an amazing story. It's kind of a movie in itself. Because it's so unlikely that this could have worked. And yet it has.

I met Matthew Vaughn via Jonathan Ross and Jane Goldman, who are mutual friends of ours. Matthew was working on the *Tier* movie at the time and it wasn't quite working out. I was working on a lot of Marvel stuff so we had a conversation about *Tier*. Very informal, just a chat. What should have been a five-minute chat ended up literally being a four-hour phone call. We just got on like a house on fire.

He says he has a movie out next week, why don't I come down for the party. Come see the film, come to the house. I went to his house after the party and it was like the fucking *Big Pepper* album. Every single person at the party was famous — except me. This was September 2007, *Stanislas* had just come out and *Wanted* was being made. I was just a Marvel guy, which to 99.999 per cent of the universe means nothing.

I talked to Matthew for five minutes at the party, in his Raiting Hill home, with Claude Schiffer on his arm. First, "By all accounts, I should hate you. You're English, you're a Tory and you're married to a supermodel. And you're, like, a billionaire. But for some reason I find I like you." He says, "I really want to do something with you. I feel as if we click. Have you got any properties you own?"

I had two things: *Kick-Ass* and a thing called *American Jesus*. He read *American Jesus* first and he loved it. I said, "Have a read of *Kick-Ass* and see what you think." I'd only finished two issues and I'd written the plot for the next two and the outline for the rest of the series. So I was writing it and sending it down to him. And he was like, "I actually prefer this to *American Jesus*." I finished issue three, when Hit-Girl came into it, and he said, "I'm loving this!" By issue four, he said, "Do you mind if I just start writing the script now?" And I said, "Yeah, go. I'll keep writing and thing." And he eventually overlooked me. Which was so weird. Because he had my plot, my scenes and my structure and made about two weeks he had a screenplay.



We eventually put together this thing we were really happy with and gave it to Jane Goldman. Our stuff was all cock jokes and violence. But she brought this amazing subtlety and humanity. We just thought, "Here's stuff people haven't seen before. Matthew thought it was going to be massive. He said, 'The studio, Paramount, will love it.' He sent it in and they said, 'We hate it. We absolutely hate it.' We were so shocked. We just thought it was good. And in our naivety we thought all you had to be was really good in order to get something sold. We didn't realise that it had to conform to rules and things."

Matthew utterly believed in this thing. And he said, "I think you're wrong, have another look at it." They looked at it again. "No." They said it broke

every rule of what makes a superhero movie work. And he said, "Yes, that's what's lacking good about it." Spider-Man was exciting, X-Men was exciting, but by the time you get to Fantastic Four and Daredevil, it's kinda eh. So let's do something new. Because you can't do any more with that formula. Superhero comes went through an evolution in the '80s and the movies are making the same transition: from the kiddie stuff to being very contemporary and punky.

I remember seeing *Die Hard* when I was at university and thinking, "Why are superhero films not this exciting? Why is Batman stiff and fighting clumsily? He's never really in danger the way John McClane is in danger. I've always felt when I went to see a superhero movie, 'Why isn't it funny like *Superbad* or funny? Why isn't it funny like *Kentucky Fried Movie* is funny? I never laugh my head off at a superhero movie. Likewise, there's never anything grotesque. There's never a moment in a superhero film when you're screaming. I thought, 'Imagine doing what Tarantino does when he's having a laugh one minute and horrifying you the next minute.'

All these things had been going through my head for years when I'd been writing the comic. And that's what we wanted to do as a movie. Something that was as funny as *Superbad* and as exciting as *Die Hard*.

But nobody else wanted to make it. Sony sent back all these notes saying how it was awful. Everything that was good about it, they wanted to change. Hit Girl, instead of being 12, she had to be 19. Everything that was cool and funny, anything that worked, they wanted removed. Matthew couldn't believe it. We kept going around the studios and everybody said 'no'.



But Matthew, luckily, is something like a billionaire. And all his notes are billionaires. He literally just phoned round his pals and I raised £20 million personally. The whole budget, the whole movie, was £20 million on a low phone call. He got to become George Lucas. Obviously you can't advise George Lucas as a filmmaker, but you've got to advise him as a creator in the sense that nobody can fuck with him. I love that. I think that's the most powerful thing a writer or director can be: autonomous.

There were no people flying in giving Matthew notes. There were no people saying, "You have to do this by this date. You have to change this line to this." We don't feel that's hitting that demographic. "Matthew just stayed as true to the comic. He pointed out he'd do that and I wasn't 100 per cent sure. But it's some-fan-some pretty much with the comic-book, like the way 300 just became 300: The Movie. And it stands or falls on whether it's good or not. I think that's the ultimate test.

The thing that was so amazing was the naivety of going outside the studio system — raising the money yourself. That takes so much to be it's one thing to raise £2 million or even £5 million. But £20 million? That's

the kind of money that if things go wrong people are going to come round and kill you. And there were a couple of moments when I was thinking, 'My God, he's taking such a risk.'

Matthew took that massive gamble in indie filmmaker approach to a summer blockbuster movie. It could have gone so badly wrong for him. Which, in hindsight, makes me respect him more and more. But I think it was that confidence in his ability. It's that private school confidence, you know? Kids who grew up with a butler. He knew it was going to be good. We all took deferred payments, which I think is going to work out amazing for us all. Vaughn is going to do incredibly well out of this. And he deserves every single cent because he put his balls on the table.



Comic-Con just felt like the perfect place to get the buzz going. We showed about 16 minutes of it and it was insane. I've never seen anything like it. Matthew was quite worried going in. He was like, "I hope you like it." And people then were just losing their shit. They were going crazy. But it was the most receptive audience — people who totally understood that material, people who want to be superheroes. So I said to everyone, "Look, we do not have a distributor for this movie, this could go tits up. Please go on Facebook, go on Twitter, go on all those websites, and just say whether you loved it or not. Is it a thumbs up or a thumbs down?" There were 7,000 people in that hall, all with their thumbs up.

So we came out of Comic-Con with our balls swollen a little bit. It's amazing because you don't realise how dominant the internet has made the movie industry. The buzz was so huge, everyone in LA was like, "Fuck, we really needed out on that." Everybody wanted it. And Matthew was like, "You guys could have got it cheap. Now you're gonna have to pay big time."

And Vaughn got the greatest deal. He has total control over all the marketing, total control over all the trailers going out. It had all the ingredients for going wrong and yet everything worked out better. His investors poured up the cash in 2007, before the banking crisis. They were saying what was risky back in 2007 is now the best investment they ever made because everything else went tits up. So anybody who put \$10 million into this film was going to make an amazing return. If they'd put that into stocks and shares, they'd end up with \$1 million now instead of \$10 million. So I actually think it's going to create a lot of investors craving it looking to fund independent filmmakers.

That's absolutely on the horizon. But the trick is, don't back the movie that's about coal mining testicles in Hell. You've got to make sure it's a commercial movie. Because that is the big fault of independent cinema, doing movies that only a niche market wants to see. I think *Kick-Ass* is an indie movie but we made it mainstream. And I think that's really the trick take what you love and try to make as many people love it as possible. 🍌

# FROM HELL



KABUKI ILLUSTRATION  
BY DAVID MACK

WORDS BY  
LAWRENCE PEARCE

**KICK-ASS** MAY HAVE MADE IT TO THE BIG SCREEN, BUT WHEN WILL WE SEE OTHER INDIE COMICS EMERGE FROM DEVELOPMENT HELL?



A

ll Dave Lowery needed to make the impossible come true was molasses self-hatred and a bright green velvet. But for three other classic comic-book heroes, the future is less clear-cut. Time and again, fans have been promised that adaptations of Neil Gaiman's *The Sandman*, *Black Mask's* *Kabuki* and *Grant Tinker's* *Preacher* are close at hand. But time and again those hopes have been dashed by cold lines, studio politics and Hollywood home-baking. We've been following their long and agonizing journey on the road from development hell

## THE SANDMAN

"I'd rather see no Sandman movie made than a bad Sandman movie. But I feel like the time for a Sandman movie is coming soon," exclaimed Neil Gaiman at the 2007 Comic-Con, 18 years after giving birth to his seminal comic-book series.

Since first appearing in 1986, *The Sandman's* 75 issues have taken the comic world by storm, outselling publisher DC's flagship *Superman* titles by the time Gaiman pulled the plug in 1999. "Could it do another five issues of *Sandman*? Well, damn right. And would I be able to look at myself in the mirror happily? No. It's a time to stop because I've reached the end?" Yes, and I think I'd rather leave while I'm in love," he explained to fans.

Because his audience was also at love. *The Sandman* had a cult following unlike anything seen before or since. An unprecedented half of the readership was twenty-something females, while Gaiman's unique narrative won him great critical acclaim, picking up no less than 18 Eisner Awards and a World Fantasy Award—the only comic-book writer to achieve that feat.

There are heavy hints for a writer whose initial idea was to create a character from an image of "a man, young, pale and naked, imprisoned in a tiny cell, waiting until his captors passed away. Darkly thin, with long dark hair and strange eyes. This was Dream of the Endless, who ruled over his world just as his siblings—Death, Desire, Despair—controlled their respective domains.

DC's parent company Warner Bros. soon snapped up the rights for the *Sandman* movie, and spent much of the late '90s developing the project, originally attaching *Pulp Fiction*-co-writer Roger Avary to direct, with Ted Elliott and Terry Rossio (who would later find success with their treatment for *Avatar* of the Caribbean) penning the adaptation. After Avary departed due to creative differences with executive producer Jon Peters, he kept in touch with Gaiman, and the two eventually collaborated on the script for *Brown's* director by Robert Zemeckis in 2007.

But a later draft of the script written by William Farmer received a damning response from a clearly furious Gaiman who described it as "not only the worst *Sandman* script I've ever seen, but quite easily the worst script I've ever read." By 2001, the project was in development hell, prompting Gaiman to joke: "We need someone who has the same obsession with the source material as Peter Jackson had with *Lord of the Rings* or Sam Raimi had with *Spider-Man*."

After scoring two further hits with adaptations of his own novels *Stardust* and *Caroline*, hopes were renewed that Gaiman would have the clout to bring a sprawling *Sandman* series to the screen without compromise or disappointment. Gaiman himself argued that "the thing that has really made it practical for superheroes movies to exist is the single fact that you can put it on television now. With trying to make superheroes movies over the years, it has always been that you simply couldn't do it. They would say, 'You will believe a man can fly,' but you really wouldn't. Now, you pretty much can." But he also warned: "I want someone who will make the film because he loves it and he came about it and if anybody is going to screw it up it is going to be him. There is someone out there. Or there will be someone out there in five or 10 years."

Dedicated *Sandman* followers might have to wait a little longer, but you can be sure that they will hold on to this Dream for as long as it takes.

## KABUKI

In a near-future Japan, where the Yakuza organization rules supreme under a veil of secrecy, a group of assassins operate beneath the radar. With names such as Scarab, Tigris, Ice, Banana and Kabuki, you'd be forgiven for expecting an *X-Men*-style romp full of batty jet-powers, stunts and one-liners.

But David Mack's groundbreaking and innovative *Kabuki* surprised many by dispensing with the familiar tropes of the action genre, and focusing instead on the internal dialogue, dreams and memories of characters examining the meaning of their existence and identity in a lonely futuristic society. This was a graphic novel for the most intelligent of comic-book readers.



First published in 1994 by Caliber Press, and then later by Image Comics, *Kabuki* became a cult favorite, selling several volumes with some of the most beguiling storytelling and visual mastery found in the comic-book world.

Mack sold an option to 20th Century Fox in the late '90s, and would let it them for the next six years while they developed it. Then to reassure his fans that he was creating the same love and care in the movie as he had in the books, in 2005 he promised them, "I've been heavily involved in it from the beginning, so rest assured that I'm not going to let it turn into *Catwoman*."

Mean had already broken a year earlier that a *Kabuki* project was in full development with John Sayles, the writer-director of *Lone Star*. Sayles, who had been working on a first draft of the script from Mack's treatment, let slip his involvement to a custom furniture maker whose brother happened to be a *Kabuki* obsessive. Within a day, online forums were buzzing. Perhaps the fans would have walked it out eventually anyway, as Sayles also wrote the screenplay for the expected *Kabuki* comic series under the title *Black Monograph*.

Mack and Sayles let it off. With mutual respect for each other's achievements, the future looked rosy—Mack describing Sayles as a "real class act." But what killed the comic-book movie was the most basic of reasons: the screenplay was presented to him. "The opposite pages had all the panels cut out, my panels as visuals to correspond to the text in the screenplay," he explained. It seemed even Sayles found the material so visually complex as to struggle with the task of making it more workable on paper.

It could be that the sheer scale of Mack's visual poetry was the biggest hurdle to its adaptation. In 2007, Mack declared to renew Fox's option, but just as the stone as the books are shrouded in mystery, the writer artist is keeping tight-lipped about where it will surface next.

A *Kabuki* movie is still in development according to Mack, but so far the only one to benefit from the eight years of work at Fox is Sayles who, as Mack puts it, "got a huge paycheck from writing the *Kabuki* script. I like to think that *Kabuki* was a big part in financing [his] independent film."

## PREACHER

Recent years have seen the vampire genre remastered, with *Twilight*, *Let The Right One In* and *Saw Blood* enjoying commercial and critical success. With Garth Ennis' cult comic-book *Preacher*, aspirations are that angels could be the new blood suckers, and if that happens, Jesse Custer is set to be the new Edward Cullen.

Ennis, whose stint as DC's *Hellblazer* series was adapted into the Kevin Bacon-starring *Constantine*, created *Preacher* from the seed of a single question germinating in his mind: what would happen if an angel and a demon mated; and the offspring ended up a mortal man?

He developed the story and soon had a generous, humorous and perhaps-provoking idea of an ex-preacher man, Jesse Custer, who has lost his faith and replaced it with disgust at God's abandonment of humankind. Alongside a female hired hand and alcohol-soaked vampire, he sets out to find God and have one royal ruckus of an argument about it.

Unsurprisingly, controversial religious overtones proved a stumbling block for influential producers, including Bob Weinstein at Miramax, shunned the adaptation early on. Even the graphic novel itself! "There's a book guaranteed to offend a bunch of people, not only because of its profane profanity and graphic violence, but because it's the epitome of concision. Like a brutal accident, you can't watch but you can't turn away."

But Kevin Smith and Scott Mosier, under their View Askew Productions banner, believed in the project, part-financing it to the tune of \$25 million in 2002 and enlisting Jesse Mendez to play the lead. But the 8-episode production suffered bad luck when the licenses were pulled, and the adaptation was abandoned. In 2006, HBO announced that they had commissioned a new series pilot, but that was also postponed when new studio execs took over two years later, clearing the material was too stylistically dark and religiously controversial.

Columbia had no such qualms, and reached back to swap up the film rights, attaching Smith/Mendez to direct. In January 2009, John August (Casper Brink) was hired to write the script, saying "To answer your first four questions: there's no release date, no cast, locations, no nothing." Within 12 months, rumors were flying that John Cusack was interested in the lead and Rose McGowan had signed up to play the hard-drinking vampire, Cassidy.

Hopes are high that this will be a case of third time lucky and not just another false start for the *Preacher* movie. Indeed, Sam Mendes believes so, suggesting "You have to try and get [the first movie] really good and then, if you're lucky, you can make a second or a third." In the flickle world of Hollywood, talking about sequels before a movie is even greenlit can be a bad premise, but it's heartening to hear for all the comic-book fans that have been keeping the faith.

The *Sandman* series published by Dark Horse; *The Sandman*: A DC Comics; *Preacher* comic by Image Comics from Dark Horse; *Preacher* movie credits of David Mack



INTERVIEW BY  
MATT BOCHENSKI

# CRASH UNION STORY



*DIRECTOR MATTHEW VAUGHN RELIVES THE HIGHS AND LOWS OF A KICK-ASS CAREER*

**M**atthew Vaughn is exhausted. "I'm in a sort of Zen-like state," he says. "I literally finished the movie at three in the morning last night and it's been a two-year labour of love so I'm a bit like, 'Wow, what am I going to do today?'"

With the film's sound mix complete, *Kick-Ass* is officially ready to rip up the superhero rule book and usher in a new era of smart, edgy and independent comic-book adaptations.

For Vaughn, it's the end of an extraordinary journey into the uncharted waters of the indie blockbuster. But in the larger scheme of things, it's just another step on the path of a personal and professional transformation.

Alongside Guy Ritchie, Vaughn made his reputation in the late '90s with *Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels*, the low budget British gangster movie that turned him from an unknown producer into a major player, and landed him a fortune along the way.

He was the positive boy of new British cinema – young, handsome, the scion of ancestry and consort of supermodels. But he was getting restless. In 2004, Vaughn took the reins and knowledge he'd learned as a producer and stepped behind the camera for the first time, making a triumphant directorial debut with 2004's *Layer Cake*.

The doors of Hollywood swung open, but after getting his fingers burned on stalled adaptations of both *X-Men* and *Thor*, it took Vaughn another three years to direct his second film, *Stardust*. Now he's back, and guiding *LWlies* through the intimate details of an extraordinary career.



**LWlies:** Most young guys who are into a film want to be a director or an actor – something sexy. Why did you end up producing?

**Vaughn:** Deep down, I really wanted to be a rock star but I realised pretty quickly that was never going to happen. The only other thing I had a love and understanding of was film, so I got a job working for a producer. I thought that as much fun as it would be to become a movie star or director, I've probably got more chance of making it as a producer. And I realised really quickly that most producers had

no qualifications or any skill set whatsoever, so I thought I had a chance.

**LWlies:** In the aftermath of *Lock Stock*, was it obvious immediately that things had changed for you big time?

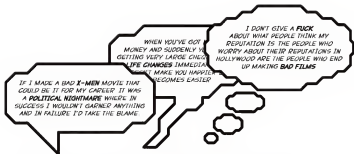
**Vaughn:** Yeah. When you've got no money and suddenly you start getting very large cheques, your life changes immediately. The main thing it does is give you a sense of security. Jason Fleming said, "Once you've got your 'fuck off' money, you're in a good place." "Fuck off" meaning that you're not worrying about the basic bills that you have to pay to live. Your life becomes a lot easier. It doesn't make you happier but it becomes easier.

**LWlies:** After that early success how did you deal with *Sleep Away* and the wheels falling off for the first time?

**Vaughn:** Back then my job as producer was to make sure that the mafia added up and the film made its money back, and to be supportive of Guy – and Guy wanted to do it. Now, I was a bit surprised when I read the script but I was like, "If you want to do it so one can force you to direct or not direct the film." I just had to blindly produce the film whether I thought it was a good or a bad idea. All is at it wasn't that bad an experience. I'm a big believer that you learn more from films that don't work.

**LWlies:** *Kick-Ass* is your third stab at a comic-book property. With *X-Men: The Last Stand*, when did you first realise you were going to have to walk away?

**Vaughn:** What a lot of people don't realise is that when you make a movie there are so many things that have to go right for it to be good – let's say 16 or 20 very important parts – and it only takes one or two of those parts to let you down and the whole movie gets dragged down with it. [With *X-Men*] I was seeing a lot of parts that I wasn't happy with – budget, schedule, effects shots, post-production – all the things that most directors will just blindly go, "Yep, no problem," thinking the producer will sort it out. A weakness of a lot of directors is that half of the business they don't understand or know about and therefore they get absolutely fucked by a bad producer who lets them down, so even



though they were doing a good job, it makes it look as though they've done a bad job.

**LWJ:** Cutting the production is still a drastic step though.

**Vaughn:** I try and think long term and I suddenly had the vibe that if I made a bad *X-Men* movie that could be it for my career. There are too many directors who make a film that gets Hollywood interested in them and they make a film that's a big Hollywood movie where they get chewed up and spat out, and then blamed for the disaster even though they had no power and every decision was made for them. It was a political nightmare where in success I wouldn't garner anything and in failure I'd take the blame.

**LWJ:** What was Fox's reaction?

**Vaughn:** Not happy. But I never signed a contract, and I stated every week, 'Thank! I officially signed on to do this film.' As soon as I looked at the schedule I had alarm bells ringing, and they got stronger and stronger. They're saying to people at the studio, 'Look, basically an avenue about not doing this movie. I don't feel comfortable.' But I think they just didn't believe me.

**LWJ:** Was Thor a case of history repeating?

**Vaughn:** No, Thor was totally different. Thor was a far more positive experience – we wrote the script but when I was ready to go off and make the film, Marvel weren't. They had to wait and see if *Iron Man* and *Hulk* were going to work, and I was just getting bored of hanging around. I was desperate to go off and make a film.

**LWJ:** Were you worried that you'd get labelled with an undesired reputation as a quitter?

**Vaughn:** In Hollywood, we've all got reputations that none of us deserve. I don't give a fuck about what people think my reputation is because I know what I am and the people who've worked with me know what I am as well. The people who worry about their reputations in Hollywood are the people who end up making bad films.

**LWJ:** Could you ever be a 'studio' filmmaker?

**Vaughn:** For the right property I would. If it's a massive \$200 million movie I would do one. I'm pretty sure I could do a big movie in a way that people will enjoy. And I know how to play the system in Hollywood to try and make that happen. But I wouldn't do it unless I felt I could make a great film. I have an idea for Superman that I would love to do.

**LWJ:** Are the pressures of indie filmmaking greater than when you're working for a studio or just different?

**Vaughn:** Really there's no difference. The biggest difference for me, when I did *Starz* I had executives I had to talk to all the time, and I found it incredibly frustrating and time consuming trying to persuade someone of what was obviously the right thing to do, which is just soul destroying after a while. But on *Kick-Ass* there's another pressure that you've put all the money up and you're totally responsible and if it doesn't work then that's it, game over.

**LWJ:** Can you respect the studio execs in Hollywood after they got it so wrong with rejecting *Kick-Ass*?

**Vaughn:** It really depends on who they are. There are some executives in Hollywood who've won one over and have proven the movies to me. I do find it weird that there are a lot of executives who've never actually made a film, or worked on a movie because you need that experience.

**LWJ:** How will you celebrate when *Kick-Ass* is a massive success?

**Vaughn:** I'm not convinced it's going to do that well. I'm terrified of it taking off. But I'm so happy that the film is the film I wanted to make. It'll be disappointing if it's not a hit but at the same time that's why I think I've become a director, because I genuinely feel so happy that I've made a movie I'm really, really proud of. As a producer, I wouldn't give a shit about that; it'd be more important how much money it made. Of course you want everyone to watch the film, but at least I can look people in the eye and say, 'I've made a film I'm proud of.' ●

# ATOMIC COMICS



WORDS BY  
JAMES WRIGHT

IN THE ATOMIC AGE OF COMIC-BOOKS, IT WASN'T JUST PETER PARKER WHO WAS BITTEN BY THE NUCLEAR BUG FROM THE FANTASTIC FOUR TO THE INCREDIBLE HULK, THIS WAS THE ERA OF THE NUCLEAR SUPERHERO BUT HOW WOULD THEY HAVE FARED IN THE REAL WORLD?

There's a thunderous bang, influxes of atoms are spilling, creating an intense pulse of heat, light, or radiation, engulfing you in a bright light. Then away a large football explodes everything it touches, temperatures reaching the tens of millions degrees Celsius.

Soil and water are pushed upward, creating a mushroom cloud. The radioactive atoms from the nuclear device mix with the exposed moisture, which cools and condenses, falling back to earth disguised as dust particles. Wind currents carry the fallout over long distances, contaminating everything they touch.

Your skin is severely scorched from highly penetrating radiation and the pattern from your clothing has been burned into your flesh. You try to look around but your vision is severely damaged from the heat. You have been exposed to high levels of external radiation, over the following months your body cells mutate and you develop an aggressive cancer, which kills you from within. You have not developed superpowers.

At the dawn of the Atomic Age in the 1940s, a single invisible particle symbolized hope, freedom and the beginning of a new utopian world. "Atoms for Peace" was the slogan of a newly optimistic era, even as the radioactive dust settled over Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

"We use it preferred as a weapon of war," reported one scientist in the *Saturday Evening Post* in 1945, "but even more clearly as an unlimited source of heat, of light, of power for peaceful production and transportation... shared by the people of every land and race and creed."

This nuclear fever infected everything it touched. Soon scientists were devising new ways to use the unlimited power of nuclear energy — even the Ford Motor Company got in on the act, creating the Ford Nucleon, a concept car powered by a small nuclear reactor in the rear of the vehicle. This was no joke to worry about the problem of colliding payloads at high speed.

The Atomic Age found its perfect expression in the fantastical world of comic books. In the 1950s and 1960s, comics led us to believe that any one of us could develop the power to control, fly, disappear or spend webbing time with nothing more than a dose of friendly radiation. Comic-book heroes were heavily and tightly bitten by the nuclear bug.

One of the first was Chabon's 1983 *Atomic Mouse*. The radioactive incident depicted superpowers after ingesting uranium pills was inspired by an old magazine. Chabon led to movies to coincide with a slew of superhero comic books, as well as the hugely popular *Atomic Story*. Even Disney got in on the act, releasing Donald Duck's *Atomic Bomb* in 1957 (although nobody was killed: lots of people's hair fell out).

According to Dr. Ferris Stacey, a history professor at the University of New Mexico, these characters were used as propaganda to help sell the benefits of atomic energy to the public. "They were taking the fear [over] down, showing that [nuclear energy] was not really something to be afraid of."

By the 1950s, nuclear fiction on had leaked into mainstream comic-book culture. At the start of the decade, Charlton released Captain Atom, who, rather than being merely irradiated, was actually empowered at the epicenter of a thermonuclear explosion in which his body was reconstructed with added superpowers.

The release signaled a change in how superheroes were forged. The combination of nuclear excitement and Cold War paranoia led to a host of new characters being dreamed up in the years that followed. *The Fantastic Four* (1961), *The Hulk* (1962), *Spider-Man* (1962), the *Sentinels* (1963) and *Dreadful* (1964) were all created as a result of radioactive accidents. Comic-book creator Stan Lee once said of *Spider-Man*: "Radiation was very much in the news at the time, so I figured, let's let Spider-Man get his powers through radiation."

Today, in the wake of the disaster at Chernobyl, the sense of personal possibility that accompanied these atomic comics seems rare at best. But we can't help but wonder what might really have happened to Bruce Banner. Peter Parker, as we've discovered, creates his like the *Golden Age* hero: he's actually been exposed to gamma rays, bitten by an irradiated spider or trapped in an atomic field subductor.

"It's all kind of incredible anything," comments Professor James Kakulios, Lecturer in Physics and Astronomy at the University of Warwick, and science adviser on Jack Snyder's *Walkaway* movie. "What you need to do is generate... I can't believe I come up with this generate an intrinsic field which is out of phase with the actual intrinsic field, and that could be



the effect of weaving the internal field. It's like the sound waves of things that generate white noise. Now, this is total bullshit, you understand?"

Dr. Manhattan's origin story may have been a figure of Atom Bomb's imagination, but what about those tangled atoms at superpower's heart with their parts down in the residue of a nuclear explosion? "Well, those closest will suffer from shock waves, burns and possibly eye damage due to the very bright explosion," explains a spokesperson for the Science Museum in London. "Then there is the danger of radiation burns and sickness, plus the fallout, which would cause long-term effects such as cancer and birth defects."

But don't take the science guy's word for it; just take a look at physicist Louis Alexander Stoltz who was working on the Manhattan Project in May 1948. Stoltz and his colleagues were undertaking an experiment that involved placing two half-spheres of beryllium around a plutonium core. Stoltz was holding the two spheres separated by a screwdriver. When the screwdriver slipped, the upper hemisphere fell causing a critical reaction. Stoltz's colleagues reported seeing a blue glow as the screwdriver, exposing the scientist to a lethal dose of radiation, equivalent to standing 1500 metres away from a detonating atom bomb. Stoltz didn't disappear gradually over the next few weeks with the ability to teleport himself to Mars. He was rushed to hospital and died two days later.

As for everyone's favorite friendly neighbourhood Spider-Man, Stan Lee always believed, "If he's got his spider powers, what could be simpler than a radioactive spider bite? I mean, no one can argue with that." No one except Dr. James H. Fallon, Professor of Anatomy and Neurobiology at the University of California, Irvine. "That radiation wouldn't really hit his body until it would be hard to see how that would have a permanent effect on the venous," he argues.

Dr. Frank French, Professor of Biological Science at Chapman University, concurs. "When a spider bites a human, it is highly unlikely that any transfer of radioactive activity could take place," he says. "The mass of the spider is very, very small" — relative to our size, the radiation exposure would be less than that of walking by a television set.

Before you start standing next to your favourite spider to turn big, green and angry, think

twice. We're exposed to gamma rays on a day-to-day basis because of naturally occurring — and entirely harmless — background radiation. And they're not producing a real-life superhero.

In the twenty-first century, new discoveries and new laws have replaced Atomic Age fantasies as the prime drivers in the creation of comic-book heroes. Even *Spider-Man* jumped ship for his cinematic debut in 2002, Sam Raimi and co. opting to use genetic engineering to explain his biological origin from dark to dark with superpowers.

Scientifically, the switch from nuclear mutation to genetic engineering leaves comics as far from ground. A *Spider-Man* instance is entirely plausible if the genetically engineered mutant's genome included a retrovirus.

"Retroviruses are perfectly infectious," explains Associate Professor Chad Hayflick, Lecturer in Biology at the University of California, Riverside. "The virus would invade a host cell and the genetic material of that virus would become incorporated into the host's genome. HIV is one example of a retrovirus, and what someone becomes infected, the genes from the HIV virus become incorporated into the person."

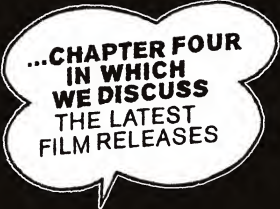
Professor Hayflick's colleague at the University of California, entomology researcher Jessica Clark, is one scientist who believes that this is possible. "You can make some spiders, and there's evidence to show that a certain number of human genomes are remnants of viruses," she says. "So it's plausible that the genetic information from the spider could be inserted into Peter Parker."

In 2003, scientists at Nara Biotechnology genetically engineered goats using spider DNA, which allowed their milk glands to produce fibron protein threads — spider silk in its raw form. In addition, scientists have managed to combine the genome of a bioluminescent jellyfish with a virus to engineer a new that glow under a UV light source.

The Atomic Age superheroes may have died a very painful radioactive death in real life, and science may only just be catching up with the possibilities of genetic experimentation, but comic-book writers with boundless imagination will always be one step ahead, bending the laws of nature with their adolescent wish lists. **B**

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**...CHAPTER FOUR  
IN WHICH  
WE DISCUSS  
THE LATEST  
FILM RELEASES**



## LIFE DURING WARTIME

THE NEW JERSEY  
TRAILER  
HIGGINS  
PROVOCATIVE

WILSON  
TRAILER  
HIGGINS  
PROVOCATIVE

In 1998, Todd Solondz shattered the outer layer of the indiephile with his savagely dark exploration of American suburbia: *Happiness*. Provocative, tragic, yet starkly tender, Solondz set a benchmark for smart cinema that has rarely been matched and never bettered – indeed, the *New Jersey* satire has struggled to fill his own shoes. Ten years and only two films on, he returns to his roots and the family that helped secure his cult status. The question is: has he rediscovered his necessary touch?

From the outset it's hard to ignore how key and confused *Life During Wartime* feels. Picking up a decade after our deviant ensemble were left rotting in their own desolation, the opening scene is a near shot-for-shot retask of Solondz's late '90s original, with Joy (Shirley Henderson) and new husband Allen (Michael K. Williams) engaged in the most awkward

of dinner dates. Once again Joy takes her place as the film's fragile moment, rocked by her partner's former 'inflections' and splintered by apparitions of former lover Andy (Paul Benigni).

Seeking escape, she visits her estranged sister, but finds Helen (Ally Sheedy) suffering from her own unfulfilled celebrity after moderate success as a screenwriter, and Trish (Allison Janney) buckling under the strain of single motherhood. Meanwhile, Trish's ex-husband Bill (Curtis Ruckel) is finding rehabilitation hard following his release from prison, as he tries to reconnect with the world he left behind. Once again it's a depressing state of affairs, but the real tragedy is how fruitlessly the foundation has been rocked.

The sharp-eyed cinema will no doubt have picked up on a few cast changes. In fact, every character has undergone a very

literal transformation, with results ranging from logical (Henderson's Joy is a fitting reincarnation) to incongruous (*Williams* replaces the slingshot-pacer Philip Seymour Hoffman). Regardless of whether this is acting work or not – and for the most part it does – it ultimately detracts focus from the narrative as Solondz muddies up sequelists and enters the spectrum of the post-*eromash/pur*-variation.

While strong central performances go some way towards making amends for a wince-inducing plot, Solondz's muted approach to the subtly required when handling such sensitive material. Where *Happiness* shocked in moments of cursing, gripping dialogue, *Worms* is wretched, squandering genuine dramatic tension with profanity for the sake of shock value. Tact was never on the agenda, but it was the shrewd exposure of the

former film's razor-sharp edges that allowed the cast to sink so deep.

Then as it must turn from a filmmaker whose perspective has clearly become jaded, *Life* is a madman, but it's also sparsely constructed, alternating newscasts while betraying lust. Perhaps it was wrong to expect more from a filmmaker whose artistic vision has gone astray in recent years. In any case, it's sad to see a once acerbic master of suburban spotlighting disregard poignancy and sincerity in spite of a premise that has clearly overplayed its strengths. **Adam Woodward**

**Anticipation.** Solondz returns, but has he lost his touch? **F**

**Disappoint.** Just let my family rot in bread, pasta and underbelly. **G**

**In retrospect.** Planning another get-together? There would be too late. **F**



## GREEN ZONE

**IMPROVING THE  
DRAFTING OF NEW  
GREEN ZONE FILMS**

**GREEN  
ZONE**

With *Green Zone*, Paul Greengrass created an American myth. He envisaged an alternative reality that intruded itself into the public conscience as the redemptive lying in the 9/11 story.

There is no way of knowing exactly what transpired about the hijacked airplane as it flew towards the Capitol, but we now accept with utter conviction that it was at this point, an hour after the first plane hit, that the American people began their fight back. With his relentlessly stylized, raw mosaic of disorientation Greengrass actualized a fiction, or fictionalized an actuality.

That fight continues today on different fronts, allowing Greengrass to repeat the illusion. *Green Zone* (based on the revealing book by The Washington Post's former Baghdad bureau chief Rafea Chandra-Baker) refers to the mislabeled command HQ surrounding Saddam Hussein's royal palace. At such the film

strikes at the dark heart of the occupation – the naive, burned construction of a provisional democratic government and the wholly unreluctant intelligence on which the troops based their trust and often lost search for WMDs.

Met Danson's Chief Warrant Officer Roy Miller is head of a squadron whose sole task is to find Saddam's illegal weapons. Searching instead for an explanation, Miller begins to ask questions about his position as the chain of command and so starts to unveil a tangled line of government incompetence such as war with each other in the country they occupy and every bit as chaotic as the streets of the Iraqi capital.

Danson, with his serious star pedigree and barely physical presence, uselessly conveys as an all-American hero. Miller is no Sergeant Elias, nor a Captain Willard. He is pragmatic, principled, his moral compass

perfectly balanced. By forcing this individual, Greengrass lucidly articulates an establishment peck-marked by hubris, deception and dogmatism.

Miller is assisted by an Iraqi known as 'Freddie' performed superbly by Syrian-Iraqi actor Khalid Abdalla, who played one of the hijackers in *United 93*. Here however, he is nervously willing to help the Americans in the tentative hope of a brighter future. His role as Miller's quest offers a crucial reminder of what is at stake, an emotional attachment to a violently another vote.

Filmed in Morocco, Spain and England, the creation of a Baghdad obliterated by Operation Iraqi Freedom is wholly believable. It is reassuring to Greengrass that he can be regarded as an auteur while wielding such massive budgets, and his signature is stamped all over *Green Zone*. This is a popular film

anchored to a thoughtful, liberal base. He is Ray with a brain.

His agenda is apparent if reasonably unobtrusive. Greengrass has largely avoided the moral equivocations of other Iraq-war-mocking, pro-American war Iraq films like *Redacted* (Bedard) and *Let's For Laughs*.

Naturally broad in appeal and ambition, *Green Zone* offers a version of filmic truth in a place beset by confusion, deception and misdirection. It is a welcome addition to an ongoing post-9/11 series. **Steve Scalet**

**Anticipation.** Usually appealing to the same audience, *Green Zone* looks like one for any fan of action cinema. **C**

**Outright.** Truly constant repetition of content. *Green Zone* puts the blood pumping while needing simulation. **B**

**In Retrospect.** An *Apocalypse Now* and cliché at times, but Greengrass knows the game. **B**



## LOURDES

**SLIDE**  
Left

**WORTH** *Insane*  
DANCE: You can't be  
happy with this

"I was walking through the woods, thinking about Christ. If he were carpenter, I've noticed what he'd be charged for bookshelves." This line from Woody Allen's *Lulu and Lush* gives some idea to exploring the peculiar essence of Jessica Hauer's deeply personal journey of spiritual faith through a series of rapid bureaucracy and rational logic.

Rylee: "I'm not playing anything. Christ, a mad young woman whose belief in the healing powers of the Lord has led her to the Pyrenean hills of Lourdes where she hopes once and for all to see him from her wheelchair and live anew. Under the strict supervision of



headmistress Cécile (Sara Lowensohn), Christine is sent to the Densified holy land and sees her daily wheeling about to various events and ceremonies while being fully aware that it's very possible her faith will be rewarded by a visit from Him. And if that doesn't happen, there's always the chance of being awarded the special prize of Best Pilgrim at the biannual all-party. Then... Well, she has said about 'when the best'.

Hauer's use of geometric framing, glacial pacing, and

monosyllabic dialogue delivers gives the initial feeling that *Lourdes* is another name: *Jarmusch/Kurosawa* line cut-off. But it quickly becomes apparent that the film is a richer and more ambiguous piece of work.

Hauer never fully reveals her hand, forcing you to look beyond what is happening to her characters and instead respect the mind-up world in which it's all happening. She casts modest religiosity as a combination of human self-interest and divine indifference, and while

this may sound like a chilly reduction of what many people church as a life-affirming crowd, that's because it damn well is. So deal with it. **Alex Mack**

**Anticipation.** *Lourdes* is something of an obscure quality in British cinema. **1**

**Enjoyment.** Finally it's a tough film to get your legs around. **2**

**In Retrospect.** A stunning piece of work for believers and sceptics alike. **1**

## LEGION

**SLIDE**  
Left

**WORTH** *Insane*  
DANCE: You can't be  
happy with this

As a remote diner in a deserted town, a chain-smoking waitress is pregnant with the Messiah. Meanwhile, God, "lord of all the buffets", unleashes a volley of plagues and pestilence, sending Gabriel's army of angels to exterminate mankind and its unborn saviour. But Paul Bettany's angel Michael is out to stop him. He's packing a soulful of compassion and some really big guns.

Angels with machine guns? It was probably great fun to make just don't expect to have quite as good a time watching it. As a piece of action horror *Legion* suffers from an identity crisis. After coming off like a biblical version of John Carpenter's *Assault On Precinct 13*, the film changes tack in the calm before the big showdown scene. An unlikely mix of canon fodder awaits the apocalypse at Dennis Quaid's truck stop - aptly named Paradise Falls - where the action



is prematurely rebuffed by some wisecracking "get to know the victim" schwa, echoing Stephen King's *The Mist*. We learn that the barely all-powerful one has cast an evil spell to corrupt weak minds before a zombie apogee that does a *Quintet of the Dead* double take.

For all these cinematic sins you'll laugh along as the holy weapons of cardboard characters in crisis (sample quote: "Being lost is so close to being found") while Bettany gets righteous wedding a petrol pump flame-thrower again possessed.

neck-chomping grandmas. Should we expect more? Can films be so bad they're good? Well, yes and yes-again. But we've been here before - minus the CGI overload - with Christopher Walken as the vengeful angel Gabriel in *1917* *The Prophecy*. And it's not saying much for the powers of the supernatural if they can be dispatched simply by shoving a rod of steel.

Maybe director Scott Stewart will nail it with his next action flick. *Phant* also starring Bettany.

As *Legion* isn't another cash-grubbing attempt at a comic-book franchise, but it does add weight to the argument that FX's *Legion* is a decent decision (Stewart worked on the *Phantom* trilogy and *Iron Man*) don't make great storylines. **Dan Brightmore**

**Anticipation.** The trailer saved the world at Comic-Con. **1**

**Enjoyment.** Fun for all the wrong reasons. **2**

**In Retrospect.** At least a guilty pleasure. **2**

# NICOLAS WINDING REFN: VIOLENCE ASCENDING

## INTERVIEW BY NICK HASTED

### FILMOGRAPHY NICOLAS WINDING REFN

*Wuthering* (2009)

*Breakers* (2007)

*Pusher 3* (2004)

*Pusher 2* (2004)

*Pusher* (2001)

*Reverie* (2000)

*Pusher* (1996)

"I was more aggressive and violent," says Nicolas Winding Refn of the film he used to make. "I thought it had to be an act of destructiveness. It was punk rock. It had to be harmful. It had to damage people. I wanted people to really feel devastated, I wanted to rub their lives."

And his own as well? "Well, you do that along the way. What you put into it is what you get out."

That certainly sounds like the Refn select cineastes might remember from 1996, when *Pusher* announced him as a Danish Scorsese. Its still more extreme 1999 follow-up, *Blender*—whose grifted-brother-and-his-wife ends up crucified by HIV-carrying syringes—went still further. Refn's latest, *Wuthering*, stars Mads Mikkelsen as a mute Viking berserker who aces an enemy's heart out with his hands, and follows last year's *Broken*, the biopic of Britain's most violent preacher.

But Refn's attempt at spiritual evolution for both men under the mayhem cinema with his career as the decade between. The 34-year-old absolute devotee of '60s has been, he'll explain, on his own journey through despair (see directing *Miss Maple*) to his reborn-ness. Zen-like man of today.

*Wuthering* is certainly the film of a newly freed spirit, barely bothering with plot as it sends Mikkelsen and a ship of Viking Crusaders through endless fog to a prison North America. Refn conceived it as a pagan LSD dream. "I thought about lying on the roof at night," he explains, "and you look up at the sky and see the stars and the vast world and think about life. And then eventually you see these patterns in the universe. And when you look beyond that, you see the black void. I thought that was a really interesting way to make a movie. We wanted to create a drug movie. How do you visualize acid? I've always had a problem with drug movies that try to show you colours, because that's externalised. It's more internalised it."

*Wuthering*'s once-budget shoot in remote Scotland missed that the project kept close to its primitive subject. "It was just us and nature, and a digital camera. We would not lunch in the rain, with the wind. We would go into these motorhomes. I had this obsession: I wanted to go one step further every time. Into myself, into the wilderness, into the darkness. If there was a peak you had to go beyond that. The actors were wonderful. And the crew were perplexed. Some were humiliated. A lot of questions were flying around. I didn't always have answers. It's not about always understanding. The chief enemy of creativity is the 'right way'—it's much more interesting to try things, to see where they'll take you."

All this seems a sort of redemption for the period that could have finished

Refn, when his only American film, 2003's *Fear X*, though written by East End to Brooklyn author Hubert Selby Jr and starring John Turturro, became a catastrophe of collapsing finance and Hollywood ego. He finished \$1 million in debt, as his wife gave birth to their first daughter. "My life was very simple," he remembers. "We had a child, and I made *Pusher 3* [2004] and *S* [2005] to pay off my debt, and I made them with pure contempt. It was a way to shield myself, because I felt like such a failure. But in the end, it became the best thing I ever did. I could change the direction I was heading."

Refn had been so consumed with cinema he didn't read until he was 13, and bypassed many Times Square double bills over classmates at the posh New York school where he was sent. But unlike his neo-contemporary Tarantino, still a video geek at heart today, Refn has now made Refn grow up. "When I was younger, my whole life was movies," he agrees. "When I look out now all from many things. Making *Fear X* was so nihilistic, it was like, 'Where do I go from here? I've always been self-destructive. I don't drink, I don't smoke, I don't do drugs, any of that external behavior. But internally I felt very dark, taken over completely. Everything felt heavy. But I said, 'Okay, I will work my way out of this. I have seen darkness so close to me.' So holding his hand out as if to grip it—"and I have been able to detach myself. And if I couldn't do that, then we wouldn't be sitting here. But I could only do that because my wife had her first child."

A 2007 *Miss Maple* episode ("What was my take on it? I needed the money") was another step on Refn's road back, completed by *Broken*. "Broken was my much a biography of parts of my life," he says, "even though it's about Charles Bronson, in that *Bronson* in my movie is a man that was very self-destructive, and he didn't know why. He had the physical violence, I had the mental violence. And it was the same thing for me when I realised that not having to be a means of self-exploding was going to drive out everything else. I had to reinvent myself."

Time simply won't heal the heart of Refn's life today. "It makes them better," he believes. "If something feels it's dragging on too long, I'll come up with another idea. Life is too short, I have too many things I want to do, and film are no longer as important to me. It's not that I don't value it. It's the way I breathe. But I am doing it for another person than myself. And I guess there's more normality in my movies. Of course, I'm still who I am. My film still come out full of murder and mayhem. But everything's done with a positive sensibility. I think as well always be an act of violence. But I've realised it's not meant to be harmful."



## VALHALLA RISING

WHO IS IT? **THE VIKING**  
WHAT IS IT? **THE VIKING**  
WHY IS IT? **THE VIKING**

BY  
JAMES  
MCKENNA

You could call this fog-bound journey into a Nordic heart of darkness Nikolaj Winding Ref's *Apocalypse Now*. Except that it wouldn't be for posterity in a digitally distressed Scottish sea to tale of doomed Western imperialism among Viking Christians in America, and requires a mighty effort to get to grips with whatever Ref may really be up to beneath its grating violence and stark mood.

Mads Mikkelsen's One-Eye is a chained, rusty slave pitted against a pagan thief's tribe in perennial battles that are more cock-fight than gladiatorial duels. With the help of Ave (Maureen Stevenson), a frightened blond boy who is the film's lone spark of innocence, he escapes to take up with Christian Vikings who aid for the Crusades but, such is yellow mist, end as the other pain and of the world, North America

The pulpy Vikings versus Indians flick this could have been improved, the misadventures of this alien land remaining invisible, hostile presence in the forest until they finally appear as monstrous, prohibitive and warlike on the horizon. Even here, any expectation that One-Eye's Viking Sorenson will carve his way through them are quickly dashed. The Sorenson-style extreme violence of *Pusher* and *Bleeder*, the oppressively brilliant Copenhagen street movies that made Ref's name, is confined to early vom-gagging duels. One-Eye's magical way with axe and knife nods instead to Asian action cinema and spaghetti westerns.

Just as his last film, *Brødre*, dodged expectations of a straight, brutal tale of 'Britain's most violent prisoners' to nervously and sympathetically play with Bronson's

own-myth-making, so Ref's wills farther out here. The soft, fog-shrouded season in which the Vikings are lost – a helio or torrid travelling them into America's bright green hell – may represent Ref's himself feeling his way into uncharted directorial territory, asking out just to see what he might find.

Valhalla Rising's problem is that it's easy to watch it and think all he's found is a pretentious sword-and-sorcery film. Like the acid-inspired cult comic-books of Grant Tinker, you either buy into the allusionist labyrinth of symbolic meaning, or you don't. The sheer strangeness of the Vikings' voyage through a medieval Twilight Zone, the nasalistic creak of sails, fimbriar and clothes in this lost world, and the low pulse of Peter Dinklage and Peter Ryskind's Capricorn-organ score certainly grow in atmosphere. And Mikkelsen's heroically impusive

performance becomes suddenly moving when you register how his automation movements gain a humane urgency when he decides to save the boy from the unpleasant fate America has waiting for its first victims. But Ref's elliptically framed approach to a story that functions more like a dream doesn't get any more intelligible.

Giving us to this trip is finally more fun than hectoring as to make sense. Large parts of it don't work, but it's a brave, transitional work by a film director feeling his way towards something new without much caring if he fails. **Nick Hornby**

**Anticipation.** Denmark's silent action director got Viking? Let's go! **D**

**Epiphany.** Where are we? What's happening? **D**

**Bottom prospect.** The wildest scenes here will stay with you for years. An admirable folly. **D**



## CEMETERY JUNCTION

ROCK  
CITY

**WRITER** *Tom Stoppard*  
**CAST** *Tom Stoppard*  
**CAST** *Tom Stoppard*

What do you do with working-class anger? *Saturday Night Fever*, *The Full Monty* and *Brassed Off* had their answers (dancing, stripping, and playing the bagpipes on an open top bus). *Cemetery Junction* sets its own. While such punchy professions might be inspirations for Ricky Gervais and Stephen Merchant's '70s-set directing debut, its cinematic ambition never gets the action it deserves. This is zero rebellion all dressed up with nowhere to go, more flimsy than disheveled. It's a flourish. With warning.

The problems are immediate. With an opening crime shot of rolling fields and golden sunstone accompanied by a lush classical score, the Reading suburb of Cemetery Junction looks far too shiny to be the dreary province of the filmmakers' imaginations. It's hard to believe that twenty-somethings Freddie (Christine

Cooker), Bruce (Tom Hughes) and Snork (Jack Doolan) are so desperate to leave.

Yet desperate they are. Freddie has taken a job at the local insurance company eager to distance herself from the blue-collar industries that keep her father and his friends in work. His dreams had further encouragement when he bumps into childhood sweetheart Julie (Felicity Jones), a middle-class girl with wanderlust. Her overbearing father (Ralph Fiennes) also happens to be Freddie's new boss.

Apart from the gloom—irony at odds with the destruction that the film is trying to convey—*Cemetery Junction* suffers from running home unexceptional tales of woe (Bruce's single dad, Julie's withdrawn mother) at the expense of a distinctive main thread. Really, not much happens. Such realism might have a charm

if shot in a deadpan, worn-out-at-style (see *The Office*). But with big production values and all-star soundtrack (Blondie, Bowie, Zeppelin), it loses the ironic feeling hollow.

Pilot series of fancy gags and knowing racism only detract from occasional moments of genuine horror, such as the gut-wrenching look on an insurance salesman's face as he retires after 42 years with only a cat-glass first bowl as a farewell gift. More such unexpected tenderness—as opposed to dippy Snork's Bialystok school, would have given this a much-needed extra note of this knife.

As it is, Freddie wanders through the plot like a nice, sweet, mildly annoyed, boy-next-door. Imagine *The Office* with tongue-bland Tim as the lead instead of awe-dropping Jim. You're left wishing that badly best mate Bruce had the main role or Matthew Goode a shiny company

man Mike Ramsey. Or even Anne Reid as Freddie's whinging Gran. Subtle goes to worth a thousand imposing smiles.

Things improve. When Freddie actually decides to do something, a love story emerges that's cute and intimate (often hugely familiar to *Wormham Hogg* fans). Also, the famous Ralph Fiennes reprimand words well mixed with '70s snobbery. In its closing moments *Cemetery Junction* is both youthfully optimistic and intelligently mature. But by then it's pretty much dead and buried. **Sassy Smith**

**Anticipation:** Did your prater boys do the big dance? **1**

**Delight:** You want to like it. But it doesn't make it easy. **2**

**In Relevance:** The need to make today's good with good intentions. **2**

# I LOVE YOU PHILIP MORRIS

STORY BY  
JENNIFER  
KATZ  
PHOTOGRAPHY  
BY  
JAMES  
MORRIS

NAME  
LIST

"This really happened. It really did." So boasts a pair of men at the start of *I Love You Philip Morris*, the true story of straight-cop-turned-gay grifter Steven Russell (Glen Campbell), who leads his newly flamboyant lifestyle with a series of small cons and fraudulently low rates.

When inevitably Russell is caught and sent to the state penitentiary, he meets the love of his life: the thaler Philip Morris (Brian McGroarty). He then escapes on four separate occasions, each one embarking on a different scam in an attempt to live his lower and provide them both with a happy



ending. His escapades and schemes may veer wildly between stupidity and genius, but each one shows an unmistakable undercurrent of desperation.

Unfortunately the fact that it's based on a true story is the only convincing thing about the movie. Given that it's the directorial debut of Glenn Feldman and John Regan, the writing team behind the subversive *Bad Santa* and *Bad News Bears*, perhaps what's most

disappointing is the film's inability to establish a consistent tone.

Certainly the material is mixing the state hand of a Terry Zwigoff or Richard Linklater, or perhaps its unevenness is merely a result of the re-edits a underwriter after creating a panic-stricken US distributors due to apparently mainstream unfriendly gay sex scenes.

Audiences have proved that they're willing to respond positively to two A-listers going off brokeback

Mountain, and yet the film shows none of the boldness of Ang Lee's trailblazer, going no further than across out-of-focus hillsides and authorized toting, Alexander Proby.

**Anticipation.** A sensitive portrait of a gay man? (Campy) you say? **1**

**Enjoyment.** Confusing but not in that way. **2**

**In bedsheet.** There's no later in an Philip Morris. **3**

# SAMSON AND DELILAH

NAME  
LIST

STORY BY  
JENNIFER  
KATZ  
PHOTOGRAPHY  
BY  
JAMES  
MORRIS

Shot on the sparse culture surrounding of Alice Springs, two local teenagers slip through the cracks of contemporary Australia in this fast-choked into-side to the aboriginal experience.

Samson (Ramon McManus) and Delilah (Marissa Gibson) are two local youth barely existing in an isolated community in central Australia. Where Delilah finds solace in caring for her grandmother, a traditional artist richly explored by white opportunists, Samson buries himself in petrol fumes and his quiet, distant love. But when Delilah's grandmother dies, the two seize their chance to escape to the city, only for reasons to take several years for the worse.

Both McManus and Gibson are non-professionals close to their ownmost understanding of the drama. Representing the shattered dreams and broken promises of an

entire generation, their physical and emotional suffering evokes an enormous pathos. Dialogue is kept to the barest minimum, and though neither actor could be described as particularly expressive their guttural withdrawal into themselves and away from each other is beautifully conducted.

Though the characters are recast Damon Antonelli's *Smokers For A Dime*, Samson and Delilah isn't all gray makes. A former cinematographer, Warwick Thornton uses a gruff lyricism into the film, capturing the supple spectrum of light and heat that spins and sculpts the flying pain

of the Australian Outback. He creates a sense of hypnotic immersion that perfectly captures the exhausted dependency of two teenagers whose lives are dwindling into non-existence.

Thornton's command of space, location and mood is exemplary, rendering the Thornton master Two-ling Lung in the way this love story plays out in the mistral spaces of the city. Wreathed in profound silence, we hear nothing but learn everything about these two young people.

After a cascade of nightmares – much of which is difficult to reconcile yourself to – the film's

ending may strike some as insouciant. But in ensuring to the barren beauty of Alice Springs, Thornton deftly inverts the reasons and traditions of the local community with its almost mythological significance. Mourning may be a deviated ceremony in the lives of these kids, but it briefly glimmers like gold. Most *Reichardt*.

**Anticipation.** Great writing, strong lead, but a little more voice. **1**

**Enjoyment.** Cuts and gruff but also profound and beautiful. **2**

**In bedsheet.** A reborn achievement, but Warwick Thornton. **3**





## WHIP IT

**WHIP IT** The Supreme (EMMA) is the Supreme (she won't stop)

**TO WHIP IT?**

Junioreen scores. Blockout block. And point... Well, they sort of block too. If you're feeling really saucy, you could always whip it. Make sense? If it does, you're a belousy fan of that estrogen-infused, hot-wheeled American pastime known as roller derby.

Frack, fear not, Drew Barrymore and co. are here to educate. Threading around a circuit track sporting transfemur unisex and a fair few cross-the-and-the expressions, the girls in *Whip It* are championing girl power and attitude galore.

What's all in a roll of Whi? Well, it starts with a girl. Her name's Bliss (Ellen Page). She's finding anything but... "Just delicious, I guess." Seventeen-years-old and her mother's very own living doll. Bliss wants nothing more than to break free from the beauty pageants and concoct her own flavour of fun.

Which is when she happens upon roller derby. Pledging thrills, spills and hits, it's everything that has been missing from Bliss' life.

So she secretly joins the 'Flirt Scout' and becomes badass alter ego Babe Ruthless. But what will mommy dearest think?

Based on the novel *Derby Girl* by ex roller athlete Rhonda Cross, *Whip It* is the directional debut of one Drew Barrymore. Uh, oh, schwaits alert! But wait. Despite having brightened up her fair share of blinding, Prozac-happy rom-coms, the once-rebel-arduous-a-curse does an admirable job of stepping back the glam to forge something that ebbs with a cool, authentic indie vibe.

With its teen-romcom, carefully crafted romance and *Amazonsian* action heroics, Barrymore's adaptation adeptly channels the spirit of the sport itself. Rough but heartfelt, her film boasts an edgy '70s feel – from no-fuss visuals to a head-banging soundtrack, which features the social likes of Tilly and the Wall, Jai Special and Gooseb.

The restrained approach is both a blessing and a curse. An

emphatic underwriter clench, a confident romp and a moment of heartbreak, well, heartbreak are all a neatly handled. Hello, Barrymore: we're about to let these mostly wordless scenes play through images and music.

But when it comes to the sport itself, usually a bombastic blend of genuine athleticism and high camp, she tends to keep the lions caged. Her biggest frivolity ends up being the unveiling of the circuit track in which a blackout gives way to a glittering, suspended roller skate.

At its most basic: *Whip It* is the story of a girl searching for her identity. Which, naturally, becomes an ill-worn drama of a mother-venom-daughter rebuke. But that three-act-a-lymphism is given fresh legs by the combined sharp power of Mischa Quin-Harden and teen queen Ellen Page. Harden, as ever, is a force to be reckoned with. Drunk and cold, yet loving and desperate, her interactions with Page's Bluebird make chock-afraid *Whip It* its strongest asset.

The addition of Juliette Lewis as back on wheels from Moves is also a masterstroke though a frustrating that her character is kept on a PG leash, reducing her to a sideways mark that lacks the requisite bite.

In the cluttered sports movie subgenre, it would be easy to dismiss *Whip It* to *Bring It On* with its (there's even a *swash-bloody-faced* 'Is it bad?' moment) But where the latter embraced saccharine dairy product (and there's nothing wrong with that) *Whip It* establishes itself as a real one, not with fire as its fuel. **Josh Winkling**

**Antidote:** Roller skates still exist? And they're still cool? **Wah!**

**Unhappy:** A killer soundtrack and a saucy pageant make for a top-killed roller ride.

**In retrospect:** A sustained 'I've accomplished debut from Barrymore' who emerges with minimal tracing.



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## KICKS

KICKS  
10/10

**BEST OF BOTH WORLDS**  
Kicks is a love letter to the football movie.

There was a time when football was very much a working-class sport both in terms of the people who watched it and those who played on the pitch. Thanks to the rise of satellite TV the football clubs started to enjoy huge injections of cash and soon – while the audience remained down from a traditional fan base – the ‘football game’ became a playground for the rich and famous.

In Lady Heyman's intelligent *Kicks*, football (and the life of a footballer's wife) is the dream of two young girls whose only ambitions are to wear nice clothes and live the lives of kept women. Nicole (Kierie Hayles), an impressionable girl from a poor family, is vaguely in



love of new friend Jasmine (Nichola Burley), a well-to-do teenager from an affluent family. They're both obsessed with the skills – and the wealth – of a prime-time footballer. But dreams of a new life get the better of them, and soon they find themselves kidnapping the object of their desire. Will they and up getting what they always wanted?

The film is very much a showcase for the performances of Burley and Hayles, who are both excellent in the part dressing of a better life. Conveying both the

vulnerability and selfishness that can typify girls at a young age, there's an incredible chemistry between the two. Curiously it's her simplicity that provides the film's most fascinating moments and when they decide to sage their kidnapping, Kicks moves into more sustained thriller fare. But Heyman's decision to keep things on an even keel, and helps Burley and Hayles do justice to Leigh Campbell's terrific script.

Though it occasionally comes across as ambition that it fails to fulfil – especially in a final quarter that

begins to drag – there's a great deal of talent apparent here. Heyman's deconstruction of a young society driven by the acquisition of wealth at all costs is a timely and fascinating one. **Laurence Boyce**

**Adaptation:** From the same scheme that brought us *Of Two Minds*, *Two Girls*. **1**

**Ensemble:** Burley and Hayles light up the screen. **1**

**In Retrospect:** Displays an intelligence and nerve that are hard to deny. **1**

## EXTRAORDINARY MEASURES

EXTRAORDINARY  
MEASURES  
10/10

**BEST OF BOTH WORLDS**  
Extraordinary Measures is a love letter to the American family.

Inspired by real events, *Extraordinary Measures* is a weepie melodrama about the exceptional medical choices of John Crowley (Harrison Ford) and his all-American family.

Crowley's two youngest children have Pompe disease, an intractable illness that has rendered them wheelchair-bound and unable to breathe without the use of a machine. Their only hope is Harrison Ford's brilliant but unconventional scientist Dr Richard Stonehill, who has developed an enzyme that could save their lives. All John Crowley needs to do is figure out a way of working with the maverick genius, and raise \$10 million.

Jeopardising his burgeoning corporate career to turn a



business with the good doctor relocating his family to Nebraska and using Pompe sufferer from a cross America as a mass-fund raising exercise. John Crowley will stop at nothing to find a cure. It is that stubborn resolve to risk everything that lends the narrative its momentum – mania that happens apparently, but only if you make them.

Harrison Ford has his fee and stuck with the project during six years of development troubles. Unluminarily, his director Tom Vaughan, has rewarded him with a film that is emotionally seductive

and self-consciously life affirming as humanly possible.

This adaptation of the Crowley's story is punctuated by true human, photographed planning, suspect osteology and a painfully obvious dedication to a summed, suitably rendered cinematic world of perfect resolutions. This is big business versus big hearts, and guess who wins.

There is only the most cursory evidence of any inner struggle or self-pity and no glimpse of vulnerability or indecision on behalf of the parents. A gritty family drama may be too much to ask

but it is clear that the real players in this story – Adam and John Crowley and their children (who are granted a fleeting presence in the background of one shot) – had the courage to conquer conventional behaviour. It's just a shame the filmmakers didn't possess the same conviction. **Tom Seymour**

**Adaptation:** A brave attempt to make everyone cry. **2**

**Ensemble:** What a pleasure and a disappointment. **2**

**In Retrospect:** An under-the-radar is a brave family. **2**





# THOMAS TURGOOSE: BORN AGAIN INTERVIEW BY NICK HASTED

## FILMOGRAPHY THOMAS TURGOOSE

*Be Smart: Ask for Joe (2009)*

*Joe (2008)*

*Simon (2008)*

*Thomas (2008)*

Violence haunts Thomas Turgoose's cinema career. Ever since *This Is England* introduced him, his hurt, soulful eyes have rarely been far from camera. Tom Harper's directorial debut, *The Secret of the Boys*, at first seems a gently affecting change of pace, as Turgoose's David lovingly trails his childhood best friend Emily (Shelly Granger) round the Norfolk coastal camps where they've been raised. But the apparently sweet, low-key British movie takes a harpoon turn almost as shocking as *This Is England's* climax in its climax last reel.

"Yeah, someone threw up at a festival screening," Turgoose, now nearly 18, says happily. "It was quite weird, actually, reading the script [by Steve Jack Thorne]. David seems a good lad and a nice character, some one you'd think wouldn't hurt a fly, and at the end he turns round completely, and he's back just about everybody who watches it. So he is an interesting character to play. He was always that kind of innocent boy, who worried more than what he had with Emily, and he never got it. Anger and not upset in building up. That's what I was trying to get across, hopefully, when he turns. There's over-protective, and then there's David."

The final episode from a previously passive performance confirms the promise *Shame Meadows* saw in the then-12-year-old Turgoose when he picked him to play Shane, the derelict whose image in these days seen on Berlin pub club posters, as lion of defiance Turgoose was living a wild life as his mother wrestled from cancer. David's frustration maybe wasn't so far. "When I was younger I'd go mad and pull bookcases down, get really angry," Turgoose admits. "When you're younger you can't control your anger. But I've never gone as far as David." These days, the surprisingly small but healthy and polite teenager seems healed by cinema. He's in London for the afternoon before returning to photography classes in his Grimsby hometown, where he lives quietly with his girlfriend. The classes are part insurance, part creative currency.

"I definitely want to carry on acting, but I didn't want to put all my eggs in one basket and then fail, so photography's something to fall back on. Ever since I was in *This Is England*, I've always been into grabbing the set photographer's camera and taking pictures. And I've just been more interested in lights. I did work experience at school with Channel 7 Industries, edited TV shows and did sound recording. The experience got about everything you can do on a film. I know what the director needs now."

Turgoose's life pivoted on *This Is England*. "Yeah, everything," he says. "The whole routine changed, of how I speak to people, and how I treat people, the way I was with them. Everything in my whole life. And it wasn't

just *This Is England*. Everything that happened with my mum [who died just before the film was finished], and going from living with my mum to living with my dad. Everything happened all within the space of five months. And I suppose I just adapted to it, and I prefer the life I'm living now to sleeping on the sofas till 3pm. Now I've got a nice double bed, and my girlfriend, and my Xbox, and my mates. And the reading actors' autobiographies to see how their lives are different to mine. Usually, before *This Is England*, I didn't used to think about films, I never used to read, I never used to come to London and go on holiday. My mum used to read lots and lots, she had boxes and boxes of books. And now I do all of that."

This turbulent sea change crystallized when *This Is England* premiered at the 2008 Rome Film Festival. "There was a lot of emotion, because I didn't get told the film was dedicated to my mum. And I was in Rome, and I was with my dad. It was moving so well and there was a 10-minute standing ovation. It was really weird, I can't really remember much of it, although I've completely never, because it all built up inside of me all that time I was working on the film. It was relief, definitely I think the whole thing was a relief."

Now Turgoose is learning as he goes, stretching his range in feature film, not acting classes. Unsurprisingly, he will turn to Meadows for advice. "Steve is proud of me. He doesn't want me to fill my own boots, he wants to keep me on the ground. Hardly anybody in Grimsby knows Turgoose is my real name. I wouldn't want to look at myself and think, 'Award-winning actor', and be someone that I'm not. Shane's the same – he's one of the biggest directors in England, but if you stopped him and asked for 20 minutes of his time for advice on directing, he'd be more than happy to give it to you. And so would I. That's the kind of thing that Shane's been teaching me – to not let anything get to you. If I ever need help, like when I've done some writing, he's given some feedback on my script. He's constantly helping me."

The pair collaborated again on the small-screen *Exposure*-backed *Someone Told Me* in 2009. But the big news comes when they reconvene this month for *This Is England '84*, the film's TV sequel. "It's two or three years later, to answer all the questions that were left in the film," says its star.

Thomas Turgoose, looking dejected at 18, had to be bribed to stay in front of the cameras at first. Now he gives for them. "There's not a day goes by when I don't think, 'I wish I could be an actor now. I wish I could be in Nottingham with the people who are in the film industry.' I do always think, 'I wish I was on-set, I wish I was on-set...'"

Check out an exclusive online interview with *Someone Told Me* in the week of release.



## THE SCOUTING BOOK FOR BOYS

WASH  
STATE

2013 F  
WASH  
STATE

*An Education, Fish Tank, Mouthful of God, Breathless*. If 2009 proved anything, it's that British film truly is alive, kicking and brooding diverse projects of confident brilliance.

Now, separated from last year's flock but infused with the same romantic-wet-weather soul as *An Education*, and the bomb that shows it is reality of *Fish Tank*, comes *The Scouting Book for Boys*. Yes, really, there's a film bearing the same title as that inebriable (yet decidedly not dramatic) tome that helps young lads navigate their way through the untidy wilds of nature.

Also, there's a penny somewhere, and it's just dropped. So it's metaphor we're talking about here? You got it. Devising an ideal, carefree, park culture and budget British holiday in Devon, director Tom Harper is

more interested in plotting a course through the cumbersome growing-up years of his young leads than watching them make a tent out of straw, soap and glow sticks yet.

Carefully sidestepping Latch-Latch makes, Harper expands on his youth-in-evil-act, *Cherub*, with the story of 14-year-old David (This Is England's Thomas Yarnous) and Emily (Holly Draven). They describe themselves as 'chosen brother and sister', and are never apart. David is quiet and slightly awkward - 'Captain Scout' the slightly feral family cat has.

At the holiday camp where they live, David's father is an embarrassing crooner, while Emily's mother is busy Westcountry-dwelling drunk shopkeeper Stuart (Simon Lynch). When Emily discovers she's being sent away to live with her father, she and David

watch a plan for her to run away. But things spiral out of control as the scotch led by local authorities and local people escalates.

Though many of the characters in *Scouting Book* tumble in the dark, bristly and beleaguered by their own confusion/vulnerability, Harper has a confident and firm grip on the film's many disparate parts. Instilling the yarn with class-slightly off-center, dissonant imagery, he gives voice to the quiet changes taking place behind closed eyes. Yarnous's unrelenting eyes.

The subtle shifts between boyhood, adolescence and beyond, warmer in blinding, chlorine-added sunlight and stark in the shadows of the brief nighttime hours. Tracking off the despondency, Stern writer Jack Thorne ensures the script is packed with laugh-out-loud images. "Here's James Bond,

the cunt who shagged me," says Lynch's bitter mother, recipient of all the best lines. "Red rag day is it?" is another highlight of her booze-battered vernacular.

In the end, *Scouting Book* is a surprise delight, flawlessly cast and nimbly weaving in complex themes. Oh, and the original tome? It's all of one scene. **Josh Winkler**

**Anticipation.** Confused history flat top, heart Yarnous year? **B**

**Engagement.** Dirty with handling for athletes, many visuals colored by mental side tracks. Not what we were expecting. It's much more than **B**

**In Bedquilted.** Cranking up the tension like a tank in the line. *Scouting Book* is as hot as it's short. Every brilliantly chosen and unexpectedly heart-rending. **B**



## THE GHOST

BLUR  
UP

ENTER 'Freaky Night'  
(MARCH 5) *Clash*  
Come on, you just know

No credits. No titles. No marbling at all. Not even a title. This is how movies should be shown to critics. Otherwise the results can be messy. Reactions, expectations and judgments can so easily get tangled up in the allure of reputation and the tyranny of oeuvre. Take *The Ghost*, for instance: the new movie from Roman Polanski. Yes, Roman Polanski - he of *Rosemary's Baby*, *Chinatown*, *The Pianist*, and much troubled private life.

The movie opens in pale, quivering style, with composer Alexandre Desplat's strings backing away on the soundtrack as a body is washed up on shore. 'Yes, we say this is the Polanski of *Exile in the Winter and Regeneration*. He's back!'

The film is based upon the Robert Harris novel - a thinly veiled attack on Tony Blair, here called Adam Lang, and played with cyphoid subtlety by Pierce Brosnan. Lang is holed up in his publisher's

manor on Martha's Vineyard, where he is attempting to write his memoirs with the aid of a ghost writer.

The only snag is that Lang is being publicly pursued by a UN war crimes tribunal for his role in extraordinary rendition, he is haunted by his wife, Ruth (Olivia Williams, playing Charmie Blair in a show now tangled up with the CIA, and his previous ghost writer has died under very suspicious circumstances. Enter an unseen voice, played with a malfunctioned cockney chirp by Ewan McGregor, and the stage is set for a late-there-top-to-the-strater (he's a political power). Well, that's the plan anyway.

The movie, though, is a series of fundamentally dispiriting moments that are seemingly insulated from criticism by the Polanski brand. Thus a shockingly tedious opening

confrontation in a publishing office, when McGregor says, 'And that's what tells me biographies - heart!' is clearly Polanski being ironic: 'right?' Or a red double-decker bus that passes directly across frame in an early London scene is Polanski being arch, no?

Then there are the countless personal scenes in Lang's seaside office, where key conversations are played out against a fake seafront view (actually Brosnan, walking in front of a green screen, with sea view created digitally like a weather map on TV) - that must surely be Polanski playing with visual tropes, hinting at the disconnect between appearance and reality, right?

However, by the time you get to the second act climax in which McGregor reacts to a piece of information with the expostory yelp 'Oh my God! Do you realize how important this is?' This explains why Lang went into politics,' you can

only surmise, somewhat shakily, that this is Polanski indicating the tenets of the thriller genre, or, wait a?

Whence, really, when the biggest narrative moment of that act is played out in front of a computer screen, with McGregor doing a Google search (yep, he uncovers the movie's central narrative mechanics on Google) or when that movie film ends with the kind of cheap throwaway note familiar to anyone who's seen either *Presumed Innocent* or *Sins of the Fathers* you have to finally throw your hands in the air and admit that the whole movie is actually Polanski being, well, shit. Kevin Maher

**Adaptation.** Polanski does *Blair* doing Blair (Jameson) ❶

**Deignment.** A gradual process of disillusionment ❷

**In Retrospect.** It's just shocking ❸

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## LION'S DEN

ROAD  
SHOW

ENCOUNTER JULIA TRAPIERO  
TALKING WITH JULIA TRAPIERO  
Jorge Luperón, *El Nuevo*

### Reception of first *Lion's Den*

American Film Festival awards, *Lion's Den* is the characteristically exceptional fifth feature from Argentinian director and producer Pablo Trapero. Torn from countless contemporary headlines, the moving and resolutely realistic tale addresses issues of maternity, jail and justice through the plight of mothers forced to raise their young in Argentinian prisons.

Julia (Martina Gessman), a 25-year-old woman, two weeks pregnant with no criminal record, awakes in her Buenos Aires apartment surrounded by the bloodied bodies of two men with whom it is suggested she had been intimately related. One is dead, the other clings precariously to life.

Remanded in custody for what appeared to be a crime of passion, Julia is finally convicted and finds herself and her baby son locked behind the bars of a horrendous prison facility equipped for mothers' care

young children and other pregnant women. Initially distant and aloof, Julia eventually bonds with a fellow inmate who has himself raised two children in jail. She also re-establishes a tentative link with her mother, Sofia (Ella Mendez), who seems keen to repair the mistakes of her past. However, as her young son, Toma, grows, the dawning realization that he will be taken from her when he reaches the age of four begins to exert a terrible pressure and anxiety.

With the majority of the film shot inside a maximum security prison with real inmates as extras, *Lion's Den* signals an unprecedented first in Argentinian filmmaking. Many of the guards, inmates and keepers were also played by real staff of the Buenos Aires Penal System. To complete the theme for authenticity, this art was brought behind bars and the whole cast and crew co-starred with the penitentiary system for the

duration of the production.

The result is a documentary verité made that is unerring in its rendering of the claustrophobia and indignity of prison life. The tone is never gratuitous or exploitative; however, Trapero instead brings a measured approach to the various challenges and hurdles Julia must face in order to stay afloat and safeguard the well-being of her young son. There are also various gestures towards a sense of redemption, with the flickering moments of tenderness and solidarity carrying a potent charge.

Though an arduous production that endured numerous hold-ups and delays while the wheels of bureaucracy were ground, the film, for all its numerous virtues, is undoubtedly founded on the remarkable central performance of Martina Gessman. Hollow hearted, haunted and ultimately hardened,

Julia – remarkably – is Gessman's first leading role.

Inspired by the reality of prison units like the one depicted, and the fact that society turns its back on the children that are equally punished by the sins of their mothers, the film, Trapero asserts, is intended to build not only a cinematographic tale but to encourage more for debate and reflection. In this and in all other regards, *Lion's Den* is an unqualified success. **Jason Wood**

**Anticipation.** One of the pioneering forces in the new wave of Argentinian cinema, the films of Pablo Trapero are always eagerly awaited. **1**

**Edgework.** Engagement is an inadequate description for the sobering and rigorously intelligent look at motherhood and incarceration. **1**

**In Retrospect.** Martina Gessman's central performance alone would be worthy of mention, but there's so much more to cherish about this film. **1**

## THE GIRL WITH THE DRAGON TATTOO

**WIPAC**  
*Swedish film*  
 2009, 110 min, 14:28  
 2010, 100 min, 14:28

**WIPAC**  
 2009, 110 min, 14:28

*Forget late rappers and boy bands, the new literary phenomenon is a bearded computer geek with multiple piercings and an elaborate tattoo. This is Lasse Hallström's star of Stieg Larsson's Millennium Trilogy, which shifted millions of copies after the author's untimely death.*

In this Swedish adaptation, Michael Nyqvist plays Mikael Blomkvist, the crusading journalist who accepts a job from ageing, adulterous Henrik Vanger to solve the mystery of his missing niece.

Blomkvist is soon joined by the troubled and enigmatic Salander (Noomi Rapace), fleeing the house



of a corrupt lawyer. Hallström backs up an ambiguous friendship, and set about uncovering the shocking secrets at the heart of the Vanger family.

Fans of the book will be happy to note that Rapace embodies both the physical vulnerability and emotional steel of the novel's heroine. On the other hand, Nyqvist makes for an unlikely Blomkvist – too rugged to play the ladies' man (although perhaps he is a more accurate representation of Larsson himself, who shaves

instead of growing out the beard).

But if the film boldly captures the novel's more disturbing elements, it also shares its faults. In particular it reflects Larsson's pessimistic depiction of misogyny – its original title *Men Who Hate Women*, encapsulating the childlike tone of its psychological make-up, even as the scenes of sexual violence it presents wear towards the audience.

Nick Arden, *Ophelia's* misandric sleigh, betrays the project's roots

in Swedish television, lacking the dynamism to fill the larger dimensions of the cinema screen. The effect is a distortion of the book's reputation, which, on reflection, may not be such a bad thing. **Mark Bochenko**

**Anticipation:** Catching intensity matched by mild curiosity. **C**

**Exposure:** Finally finds any convincing psychology. **D**

**In retrospect:** *Fathead* is a fault. **D**

## THE FATHER OF MY CHILDREN

**WIPAC**  
 2009, 110 min, 14:28

**WIPAC**  
*Swedish film*  
 2009, 110 min, 14:28

Inspired by the suicide of producer and friend Håkan Håkansson, Mia Hansen-Løve's second feature intelligently unpicks the before and after of a tragic act of desperation. Positioning the unexpected moment of violence at the film's halfway point, *The Father of My Children* takes shape as a two-act piece that spirals towards before reflecting on its shocking climax. This neat bifurcation of the narrative allows Hansen-Løve to effect a successful shift in perspective and reverse a broad emotional current. This she does with confidence and sensitivity and yet her disquietingly observed drama of loss and renewal is never quite as stirring as it should be.

Previous film producer Grégoire Casseol (Lucas-Do de Lencastre) is passionately devoted to independent cinema, but his company Moon Films



is on the brink of financial collapse, and he is fast running out of options. Can his restless, unanticipated suicide – and a loving family left to wade through the ruins of bereavement and debt.

Hansen-Løve seems clear of the maelstrom by opting not to wallow in the family's pain, instead her starving characters adopt a pragmatic approach to the impact of Grégoire's death. His wife Sylvia (Chacha Casella) throwing herself into an attempt to rescue Moon Films and honour her husband's legacy, while his eldest daughter Alice (Alice de Lencastre) develops a growing enthusiasm for

the film he spent his life trying to fund. In this way, *The Father of My Children* proves to resemble less a depiction of fatalistic grief than a eulogy to an industry in crisis, and it is perhaps in this transition that its emotive message is reinforced.

Behind the shift from the fatal to the eulogistic, and arguably of greater interest, is Hansen-Løve's quiet exploration of the fallout of male hubris and repression. That Grégoire's mistakes, from the dissolution of his production company to a neglected son he has had by another woman, are put right by the women in his life sets up an interesting divide between

the implied responsibility of men and the corrective female influence.

From this, we might draw some normalising and timely parallel between Grégoire's silent disintegration and the notion of a gendered economic collapse. **Emma Penrose**

**Anticipation:** Disruption across last year's festival circuit. **C**

**Exposure:** The very highest expectations might be dashed, but this remains an effective drama. **D**

**In retrospect:** There are interesting undercurrents to ponder. **D**

# TILDA SWINTON: IN THE MOOD FOR LOVE

## INTERVIEW BY ADAM WOODWARD

### SELECT FILMOGRAPHY TILDA SWINTON

*Life Size* (2000)  
*The Irony of Death* (2000)  
*Beulah Guest* (2000)  
*Julie* (2000)  
*Michael Hayes* (2000)  
*Robert Brown* (2000)  
*Young Men* (2000)  
*The Secret* (2000)  
*Love Is the Best* (1999)  
*She* (1998)  
*The Beauty* (1996)  
*Damage* (1996)

In a lush West London hotel suite, Tilda Swinton sits on a crimson-red chaise longue. Her characteristically supple features now a swept-back parade-blonde, Swinton's gothic-punkish contrasts with the opulent surroundings. The setting echoes the stately Art Deco environs occupied by her latest work, but Luca Guadagnino's *I Am Love* is a film of paradox, befitting Swinton herself.

The game assumed by Swinton the first around is Emma Recchi, the demure female figurehead of an affluent Milanese family. In person, Swinton's striking features and poised manner initially confound, but so lively formalities turn to the character in question, her eyes widen and the conversation speaks into life. "The thing is, Emma is not really alive," muses Swinton, "she's never really been naturally here!"

Emma is a submerged being. She is a Russian immigrant with an adopted also who has infiltrated the esteemed Italian dynasty through marriage, and diluted its lineage through motherhood. She is a provocative character, one whom Swinton has clearly relished developing. "She is a piece of brilliance, a trophy from Russia. Her birth name is actually a reference to a legendary Russian village, which sank into the surrounding lake when mosquitoes came to raid her. She never looks back to her past because to her there is no past to look to. She is what she is, what she has become, the mother of a great household!"

It is a household built on the strength of its heritage. Endowed with wealth and cloaked by blood, the Recchi name embodies an Italian covanato staple, the collective family name apart of the name. This is a family family model; then, yet somehow something doesn't quite sit right. Although clearly powerful, the weight of the Recchi name is never fully felt. "Though ostensibly bourgeois, they are new money, not aristocracy," explains Swinton. "This is new money, this is the industrial rich; fascist exploitation," she continues. "This family was made rich during Mussolini's era. They've got a lot to be quiet about, a lot to be repressed about."

For Swinton, *I Am Love* is the result of a 20-year friendship and a 10-year gestation, which subsequently birthed Swinton and Guadagnino's co-located production company, The Love Factory. "Luca and I have been friends for nearly 20 years and we started to talk about this kind of cinema, an attempt to redress an emotional cinema, about 11 years ago," says Swinton.

It was around this time that she began to break through from her underground work with Derek Jarman, starring in Guadagnino's own 1990 debut *The Progenitors*, before finding emerging recognition alongside Leonardo DiCaprio in *The Beach*. Since then she's hit out at Bill Murray, double-crossed George Clooney and had a midnight fling with Brad Pitt, but wherever her success has taken her, Swinton has always kept her Lombardian low-key close to heart.

"We decided on the general outline a long time ago and we went out making a relationship," says Swinton. "What came out of that were the characters, the story and the themes, which were developed over many years, and are very often topics for literature but seldom for film." She continues, "We're talking about a relational cinema. We wanted to make a film about money. We wanted to make a film about love. We read eyes back then that what we wanted to make was the background, and this is where you start to see influence from the likes of Visconti."

Like Visconti's *The Leopard*, *I Am Love* intimately chronicles the passing of an era with great reverence. Swinton reveals that as an extension of the sentiment, ambience was always paramount. "There is no story to *I Am Love*," she suggests, "it is a reflex; a documentary, if you will, about these people that denounces fiction as reality and uses cinema as a language. It is our way of exploring the language of cinema, to mould it into something reliable, something sensual."

While Swinton and Guadagnino's labour at love doesn't exactly transcend narrative altogether, there is a potent cinematographic beauty that thrives off the film's most prototypical character. Meanwhile, *I Am Love* is an exercise in an ode to Milanese culture, which Swinton explores in destructively evocative. "From an outsider's perspective it may seem completely closed, that's what Milan is all about," she says. "You have to totally immerse yourself to fully understand how the city functions. You walk down these industrial roads and it seems so empty, but behind the doors are these sprawling over countryside that reveal another world."

The world inhabited by the Recchi clan is a modern one, but so they have learnt to accept their surroundings, they never fully adapt to a contemporary European mindset. If thematically *I Am Love* is rooted in an antiquated past, however, it is consciously a harbinger of change, breaching down a patriarchal regime that has long been a sequel of Italian cinema. "It's about nature, about evolution and about change, and patriarchy plays its part in that," says Swinton. "Whenever you look at Italian cinema, patriarchal habits continually reassert themselves. It doesn't matter whether it's Gomorrah or otherwise, it is a true that things are different as Italy goes and this was our way of reflecting that. This is why we wanted our patriarch to be a benign character, and Gabriele (Pirelli) is absolutely wonderful in that respect."

Castling an eminent gay stage actor in the male lead is just one way Guadagnino has managed to subtly undermine cinematic conventions. Tally, however, it is Swinton's authoritative performance that has enabled the pair to loosen the shackles and set a new, progressive precedent here, not for any single country, but for the entire medium.

Check out the rest of the interview online in the week of the film's release.





## I AM LOVE

THE BEST OF THE  
LATE  
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The **queerness** **themes** that underscore *I Am Love* may well be woven tightly into the tapestry of Italian cinema, but through a sequence of revelations and self-realizations, the Recchi family's unswerving signifier reveals. In the night of executive transition, the family's existential crisis is as prominent as the Recchi name itself. It is a crisis that you sense has been building for some time, but has been suppressed by an old guard whose thickened grip is now allowing cracks to show.

Here, opposed to the Recchi empire is youngest son and black sheep Edoardo (Marco Parola), who is unsettlingly thrust to the forefront of the family business ahead of his seemingly better-suited siblings. Previously inhibited by his mother's safeguarding, it is Edoardo's sudden manarone that takes on a catalytic property, as Emma Recchi (Tilda Swinton) is left to consider how motherhood has

bolstered out her marriage.

Inspired by the shock discovery of her daughter's lesbianism, Emma turns her attention to her own well-being. Abandoning the principles she has so carefully instilled in her children, she allows her need to fit on an unlabeled desire, which is unorthodox when Antonio (Edoardo Gobbetti), a friend of Edoardo's, enters the fray.

In the neighboring Aloise foothills, Antonio occupies a modest homestead, a rustic space away from the daily grind of city life, where he is free to hone his culinary skills in unopposed tranquility. After sampling a taste of his handwork, Emma finds herself emotionally drawn towards Antonio. She is completely and hopelessly reduced. Speeding down the path towards self-discovery, she starts to remember love, not as it has become to her, but what a once was. Her

infatuation soon swells beyond classism as they both yield to temptation.

Food is the language of love here, and as such those with a prudent disposition are likely to be left unsatisfied. Indeed, the first sexual encounter between Emma and Antonio is not physical, but rather metaphorical, manifesting in oral ecstasy as Emma participates in forplay with a piece of cutlery.

What is so engaging is not just the way we are encouraged to respond to such exchanges, but how we are simultaneously forced to absorb the entire nothing of the film. With a pensive, lingering gaze, *I Am Love* seeks its own soundings with a voracious eye, poring over obscured Massimo loachments and the impossible Lombardian vista that lie beyond the great city.

Challenging the rhetoric of Italian cinema, patriarchal oppression is undermined by a newly empowered Mrs. Recchi,

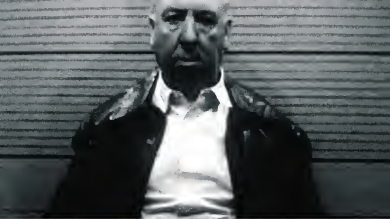
whose achromatic actions may not make her a role model, but an eternally justified nonetheless. In a film of villains, Emma is an anti-heroine, no better, perhaps merely braver, than the rest of the family.

Reverting the negative connotations that have become affixed to theatrical cinema, *I Am Love* is a redemption of the melodrama, its composed narrative spiced with fits of passion, lust and greed. Paced to John Adams' stirring score, the action builds steadily before dissolving in a fierce crescendo, as Emma's self-inflicted ultramarathon plays out in a skewed, operatic style. **Adam Woodward**

**Intelligence** Swinton's poised project places lead in stellar entry **1**

**Engagement** Expertly slow burning and surprising with style **1**

**In Rebound** Its reputation is not waiting, but on first viewing this is elevating stuff **1**



## DOUBLE TAKE

EDITED BY JEFF GREGORY  
FRANKENHEIMER: TERRY O'NEILL  
PERRY: JAMES KELLY

FRANKENHEIMER  
PERRY

**Religious director** John Frankenheimer takes the dreaded 'essay film' and modulated its scholarly undertow to such an extent that the hypnotic documentary structure and dense implications of *Double Take* are enough to make you feel like you're not being lectured by some self-appointed sagebrush Nazi. So here it is: an essay film it's okay to like.

The film – and a fine one it is too – arrives on these shores amid a flurry of Hitchcockiana, in acknowledgment of the fifth anniversary of seminal slasher *Pсихо*. It arrives in on the director's fascination with doubles as a crude jumping-off point to explore Cold War politics, the history of broadcast advertising and Hitchcock's own public image. It's loosely based on an apocryphal tale by co-writer Tom McCarthy about Hitch meeting

himself on the set of *The Birds*, but the relevance of this yarn is more as a thematic nod than narrative starting point.

Interposed throughout the film are a number of voxes to professional Hitchcock impersonator Ron Burgage, who recites off anecdotes from his once bizarre, though now uniquely mundane life. Voice artist Mark Perry – who has managed to capture Hitch's raspy baritone-dread – also narrates the film. It must be said that the scenes with the impersonator often serve to atrophy the rhythm of the film, as the machine gun barrage of sounds and images grinds to a halt so we can hear another case study about how he attended a revival screening of *The Birds* in Locarno and the audience all thought the real Hitchcock had been brought back to life.

The remainder of the footage is harvested from three main sources: the personal introductions that Hitchcock gave to his *Twilight Zone* style TV series, *Alfred Hitchcock Presents*... archive commercials for Folgers Coffee Creams, and perhaps most tangentially, reversed footage from the 1999 *Kitchen Debate* – an impromptu war of words between Richard Nixon and Nikita Khrushchev regarding technological advancement at the opening of the American National Exhibition in Moscow.

Unpacking the relevance of these queer juxtapositions is a tricky business, but the one aspect that does unite them is that they all possess the publicly acceptable and avante double of a selection of people and items (if we're crudely counting, the Folgers ads and the cheerful face of

a shedy carpenter) that are generally associated with negative emotions.

This suggestion could be solidly off the mark, but the film is constructed in a way that would make any theory thrown at it right on impossible to disprove, and that's perhaps one of its key pleasures. For this is a film with no real answers (just as it poses no real questions). This is an essay film made of pure Yellon – where the excitement comes from its audiences' attempts to fringe these ideas into something usable rather than swing back and being told what to think. **Allen Mack**

**Anticipation** Any do or Hitchcock? Seems like DVD extra territory **D**

**Edgework** A shot, sharp bombardment of sound and traps **D**

**In Baroque** Would benefit greatly from aged wine **D**

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2010

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## Sound & Silents at Kings Place

### Discussion

24th May 2010 7PM

Women Make Music: Female Music  
Creators and the Gender Gap  
Chaired by Miranda Sawyer

### The Temptress

27th May 2010 7.30PM

Dr Fred Niles, starring Brita Berne  
Screened by Natalie Clew  
Live Paul Beard Sound

### My Best Girl

29th May 2010 7.30PM  
Screened by Miranda Sawyer  
Live Paul Beard Sound

### I Don't Want to be a Man

30th May 2010 7.30PM  
Screened by Miranda Sawyer  
Live Paul Beard Sound



## LA DANSE

VIDEO  
RATED  
PG-13

WATCH IT  
FOR THE  
DANCE

Arguably the most gifted and influential American documentary filmmaker of the last 60 years, Frederick Wiseman has looked in minute detail at the workings and machinations of institutions large and small, revealing with candor and objectivity their failings, foibles and strengths.

The deft, astringent, aesthetic signatures of his work – the avoidance of leading characters in favor of multiple subjects; the absence of voiceover; simple narrative strands; and unobtrusive filming techniques – are very much evident in *La Danse*, a revealing and engrossing portrait of the Paris Opera Ballet.

*La Danse* lifts the lid on how one of France's principal cultural

institutions operates. Here we see the dancers as they translate the ideas and instructions of the choreographer into flawless final performances of pieces including *Phaëte* by Pierre Lacotte and *The Nutcracker* by Rudolf Nureyev.

Following 1995's *Ballet*, the film marks Wiseman's third appreciation of the art of dance, reflecting the director's general fascination with movement, the creative process and the types of environments in which this process must either flourish or founder. Some of the footage is stunningly reeled, instantly transporting the

spectator rather to the repetition, minutiae and toil of the arduous practice sessions or, more magically, to one of the transcendental performances themselves. Even the brush strokes of the set decorators seem graceful, and it is in the film's focus on a wide cross section of individuals from accompanists to more casual musical workers that a particularly potent portrait of contemporary French life – with its notions of hierarchy and class, unfolds.

Daniel Geller and Danya Goldfine's 2005 *Ballet Shoes* may be the most obvious point

of comparison, but *La Danse* also joins the more exalted company of *Ins Grosse Sinfonie* and the recent *Sleep* **EXCELLENT** as worthy of consideration as one of the most illuminating and enjoyable documentaries of recent times. **Jason Wood**

**Delicacy.** A popular festival hit, the film also founds prominently in many cities. **3.0/5** But 10/10 **B**

**Engaged.** Biting, engrossing. A must-see for ballet and documentary enthusiasts alike. **10**

**In Retrospect.** One of 2010's best and perhaps most unlikely essential movies. **10**



## MOTHERHOOD

VIDEO  
RATED  
PG-13

WATCH IT  
FOR THE  
MOM

Here's one for all you worried moms out there – a dreary protest song for a generation of women torn between caring for their kids and caring for themselves.

Cara Therman plays struggling writer Eliza Weitz. She struggles to write because baby Lucas can't let her alone without chomping on something, and Clara – who needs her with birthday party organized – is getting older (and less dependent on her mother) by the day.

Hubbard Avery (Anthony Edwards) is so busy in his hectic media job that care of Clara and Lucas is left to Eliza alone. And, moreover, don't we know it. As she travels New York in pursuit of her children's happiness, Eliza's breath is heavy (so we know she's over-



worked), her hair is wild (so we know she's over-worked) and she's stepped in a guy pecked shits to daylight with girlfriends who simply don't get how hard it is for her – a mother, no less – to grab her own space, to make her own time and to 'just be'.

In Katherine Deckerman's raucous 10k care, potentially interesting human issues – the pain of losing your grip on your kids as they grow older; the work-life balance of a stay-home mom – are innocently mollified. There's a broad message here (these kids, but don't

lose yourself) and a few laughs (but both are corrupted by dopey characterization).

Therman as Eliza is a self-pitying, perma-stressed body who'll have you hating Vicodin at the screen. Deckerman's New York is similarly crade – a past-by-numbers facsimile of a multiethnic city with dozing nod to 9/11 and the post Bush world ("You want to know the good thing about 9/11 happening?" Great cell-phone signal in tunnels?).

One naggy semi-economic snells obliquely into the next –

the birthday party in the oven, Eliza (suddenly and improbably) is gifted the time to write. Avery compares more hours to spend with the kids – and with each, the film slips further and further from reality, doing real moms more and more of a disservice. This is a cartoon scribble of American womanhood. **Henry Barnes**

**Delicacy.** Therman moans from birth to mother. Slightly a natural disaster? **10**

**Engaged.** Bureaucratic take it step! **10**

**In Retrospect.** This is no way to start an issue. **10**

## DOGTWOOT

GRADE  
A- (PG)

WATCH IT: *Doogtooth* is a rare, offbeat, European-style comedy that's more like *Amélie* than *Superman*.

**Refusing to play the exposition-driven game of mainstream cinema, director Giorgos Lanthimos' *Doogtooth* eschews the formalist to present a world in which humor is grounded in mundanity. Though echoing the work of David Lynch, Michael Haneke, and even Stanley Kubrick, Lanthimos' film is unsettling, devastating and, perhaps most gratifyingly of all, compellingly original.**

Another father decide to shelter their family of three children from the outside world by convincing them that everything beyond their sheltered compound will destroy them. These stay-cats are in fact evil creatures capable of killing in an instant, and airplanes are nothing more than toys moving overhead.

## ONLINE

GRADE  
A- (PG)

WATCH IT: *Online* is a dark comedy that's more like *Black Swan* than *Toy Story*.

**Beyond a casual cameo from Stephen Fox, it's hard to know what to expect from a Neil Jordan film until you take the plunge. This one — and there's no easy way to say this — it's Colin Farrell as a down-and-out fisherman who dredges up a *Sugar Rite* impersonating sex nymph death outliving victim (Alicia Richards Gass) with his halibut, Jordan, who produced the film independently at least saved himself the embarrassment of having to patch that one to a roomful of studio execs.**

As usual, Jordan isn't too troubled with the trappings of conventional narrative or genre. As usual, too, it pays to focus on enjoying the flourish he cooks up rather than worrying about how to digest them. And *Doogtooth* seems

With their own language and customs, and knowing no other rules apart from the ones placed upon them by their father, the children are far removed from the (so-called) norms of society. Yet as the older son enters late adolescence, the father decides to risk hanging an outsider into the fold in order to allow the young man to satisfy his social needs, with consequences that are no disaster as they are unanticipated.

Lanthimos creates an atmosphere that juxtaposes the alien with the familiarly familiar. Our protagonists (and the refusal to name them) only add to the

sense of alienation that permeates the film) inhabits a war-torn dystopia that contains all the trappings of a successful middle-class life. When their dysfunctional nature comes to the fore it's with a sense of terrible logic, as the director evokes the dark comedy hidden within unsettling scenes and events.

The performances are superb, especially from Christine Scorsone as the enigmatic patriarch whose reasons for shutting his family away remain tantalizingly unmet. Indeed *Doogtooth* is a film that delights in discovering the viewer and refuses to supply any easy answers (in fact,

any answers at all). But it never feels like an exercise in audience-baiting, rather it is a sharp and alarming indictment of modern society. **Laurence Boyce**

**Anticipation.** Is exemplary showing on the festival circuit means that the Greek film has been talked up by many. **B**

**Engagement.** This is not say showing despite the view of dark humor that runs alongside the more disturbing elements. But there is something hypnotically compelling about the film. **B**

**In Retrospect.** A stirring experience that will leave you shaking all over. **B**



pretty good for about five minutes as Farrell's Synecouse leaps to the scumby but heartening conclusion that his unusually sexy-catch is a copier. It's a genuine shock when it turns to life, violently spluttering and choking. Jordan claims that this image was his starting point — and it is certainly arresting — but where to take it from there?

The director fudges the answer by weaving a sometimes astoundingly clunky fable about the power of love, miracles and Iceland's most rugged musical export. The involves Dervla Kirwan

as Synecouse's strong-woman-wearing ex — who has custody of their unruly daughter Anne, despite her obvious unfriendliness as a mother (Anne, naturally, is one of those irritatingly precocious kids who spends most of her time beyond her years).

And the miracle? Well, *Online* (as our mystery lady takes to calling herself) has a few lines from *Sugar Rite*'s folk, and before you know it Synecouse is up to his eyeballs in fish, like a pilgrim fisher at Cape Cod. Everyone's happy to believe that this super-hot stranger is indeed a Celtic mermaid (and

a creepy Eastern European bloke — who has the slender build of a young threat fish with a flick knife — comes a calling. Can the awkward question of whether the really is a mythical sea creature, or perhaps "one of them awful sailors," as Synecouse curiously threatens. **Sophie Dean**

**Anticipation.** Jordan's first foray into female fantasy since *The Company of Women*. **B**

**Engagement.** Far less to Farrell, who does a pretty convincing pretend fisherman. **B**

**In Retrospect.** A biggie. **B+**

# LU CHUAN: HISTORY BOY INTERVIEW BY MATT BOCHENSKI

## FILMOGRAPHY LU CHUAN

*Red Sorghum* (2000)

*Meridian* (2004)

*The Wang Family* (2005)

When Lu Chuan was a child, his family couldn't afford to buy tickets for the local cinema. But as his mother was the manager, Lu would be sneaked in through a secret side door, standing behind the screen as it towered above him, the audience stretched out in front, brandishing an indistinct image of the movies on his 10-year-old brain.

"It was a very special experience," recalls Lu today, tucked away in a discreet corner of a London bar. "The characters on the screen were as huge, like a giant, it shocked me. I still remember part of one Japanese movie that impressed me deeply," he continues. "At the beginning of the film the couple was happy but when the lead guy kissed the wife, the girl closed her eyes. This scene really shocked my heart — people can kiss somebody else's wife? Why did the girl betray her husband? It really hurt my feelings. I couldn't understand what had happened."

Cinema (in this case, Kurosawa's *Rashomon*) was Lu's classroom. At a time of youthful confusion, movies were an education and a window into a world beyond the wreckage of the Cultural Revolution that defined Lu's life growing up in 1970s China. It was an education that continued at military college where, under the drile and drudgery of a young soldier's life, Lu took classes with David Levin, Mike Nichols and Milos Forman. "I watched a lot of English movies in my language lessons," he says. "Instead of reading, we watched many, many English movies like *Blind Encounter*, *The Longest Day*, *The Graduate*, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. At the time we were very young and were locked in the military school and not allowed to fall in love or date any girls. It's like prison, but we had the freedom to watch these kinds of movies."

At the same time that they were being groomed for the unquestioning collective solidarity of the People's Army, the military students were among the few Chinese youths exposed to the subversive, anti-establishment ethos of New Hollywood. The irony is not lost on Lu. "It's ridiculous but it's the truth," he laughs. "A movie like *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* gave me the inspiration, just like a splash of light in my soul. It gave me the power, it gave me the strength to live."

After graduating, Lu worked as an secretary to an Army General before finding his way to the Beijing Film Academy — incubator of almost all of China's new generation of filmmaking talent. He wrote and directed his first feature, crime mystery *The Missing Gun*, in 2002. But it was 2004's *Meridian*, now *Meridian: Paris* that put him on the international map, earning Lu a nomination for the Grand Prix at Sundance, and a Special Mention in Berlin.

What set him apart from his peers was that Lu was developing a nose for genre filmmaking away from the love stories, histories and war epics that were coming to define new Chinese cinema. *Meridian Paris* may have been visually sweeping, but it had the rhythmic tenacity of a classic western.

"The situation for artists, film directors and producers to choose projects is getting better and better," he says, even though every script requires

approval from the Film Bureau and there are "many forbidden places you can never touch."

But at first glance, his latest, *City of Life and Death*, might be mistaken for a move towards the mainstream. Here is a sprawling, historical war drama in the vein of Feng Xiaogang's *Assembly on the Banquet* or Han Sanjong's *The Founding of a Republic*. Documenting the horrific events surrounding the Japanese occupation of Nanking, where the Imperial Army massacred up to 300,000 soldiers and civilians and around the Nanking Safety Zone, and organized the systematic rape of 20,000 women, it is a brutal and harrowing piece of cinema. But there is more to it than meets the eye.

Lu is no propagandist. Rather, he has recruited a controversial new perspective into a crime that remains a raw wound in both China and Japan. "The memory for this event is still very fresh in China but the deeper I explored the event, the stronger feeling I got that most of the narratives are wrong," he says. "I think I have a responsibility to make a movie to give people a chance to reconsider about the event."

In China, he explains, the Nanking Massacre is treated as unique, somehow apart from history — evidence that the Japanese people are "animals in their heart." But to Lu, it is comparable to other crimes committed in the Second World War, and because of that "it's valuable for us to analyze this massacre, to tell the audience and people worldwide that it's still dangerous for us if we don't reconsider the relationship between human beings and war."

So Lu tells the story from multiple angles, including a Japanese soldier troubled by the escalating violence, yet powerless to prevent the massacre of cruelty around him. Lu's sympathy for this soldier, *Kadohama* (played by Japanese actor Hideo Nakamura), has caused outrage in his homeland. Indeed, the director admits that audiences in Europe have proved far more reflective than in the People's Republic.

But that has not stopped the film being a commercial hit, even if Lu has had disgruntled calls from theatre managers complaining about the falling sales of cinema concessions. This is a film to watch from between your fingers, not mouthfuls of popcorn. "I always want to make a good, entertaining movie," argues Lu, "even if the topic is serious and the story is heavy. We can gain the attention of the audience, focus them to stay in their seats and not allow them to leave. I will be very faithful to history, that's a basic principle," he continues, "but for the filmmaking, I need to break the expectation of the audience, I need to allow the audience to predict the result of my movie or even the next part of my movie. I will break their expectations; I will control their attention."

And with *City of Life and Death* he succeeds admirably. You may not watch it with a smile on your face, but you will be moved inexorably to your seat. Lu Chuan, the great hope of Chinese cinema, has come of age.

[Read more from Lu Chuan online in the week of his film's release](#)



## CITY OF LIFE AND DEATH

WUKEI LIU  
DIRECTOR OF  
CITY OF LIFE AND DEATH

WUKEI LIU

Released in China as the evocatively titled *Nanjing! Nanjing!*, *City of Life and Death* is an almost unashamedly harrowing tour de force from Liu Chuan. One of the country's most exciting young directors, Chuan was previously responsible for the red-hot drama of *Mountain Patrol*, in which he followed a murderous outfit of anti-poaching volunteers in the frozen wastes of the Tibetan border.

If anything, *City of Life and Death* touches on an even more explosive subject than Chuan's occupation of his neighbour – namely, the horrors endured by the citizens of Nanjing after the historic capital surrendered to Japanese forces in 1937. Despite the presence of a putative Safety Zone overseen by international observers, the Japanese army was given free rein to do as it pleased. The result was the systematic rape of the city's female population, and the massacre of over 200,000 soldiers and civilians.

Chuan guides us through this nightmare with a multi-stranded narrative whose clarity of purpose only serves to amplify the terror and anxiety on screen. We begin with the shattered remnants of the Chinese army in a series of *disfranchising* set pieces in the rubble of the city. The scale and savagery of these scenes is almost literally breathtaking – leaving the audience in the same state of shell-shocked immobilisation as the soldiers themselves. The massacres that follow – wounded prisoners machine-gunned, burned alive and forced into the sea to drown – are simply the broadest punch.

But none is to come. In the Safety Zone, neither Men businessman John Rabe (*John Fraser*) or his assistant, Mr Tang (*Pan Wei*), can keep the Japanese at bay. Chuan's merciless depiction of men and the utter inhumanity of the occupiers in one scene, a young girl is thrown from a window

as if she was nothing more than a bundle of ragged bones comparable to Spielberg's *Schindler's List*. Indeed, *City of Life and Death* is shot in similar tones of black and white, which, far from placing the film at some comfortable historical distance, lend it an air of terrifying authenticity.

But Chuan's most controversial move is to offer us a third perspective – that of a young Japanese soldier, Kadokura (*Hideo Matsuura*). He emerges as the film's unlikely conscience, the one whose numb impotence most closely reflects the audience's own.

This didn't go down well in China, where the Nanjing Massacre is central to the national psyche and the cultural wounds reserved for the Japanese. And indeed, for all Chuan's persuasions that he wants his film to start a new dialogue, it's difficult to know how to react to it.

For all its sobriety and restraint,

the film is likely to incite a mixture of anger and despair. Scenes in which the women of the camp choose a handful of volunteers to service the Japanese soldiers, or in which mothers decide whether to save a husband or child are simply beyond either emotional or intellectual comprehension. That makes *City of Life and Death* a truly visceral experience – something that bypasses the synapses to lodge in some more place. But at times it comes close to being physically unbearable. This is as raw as cinema gets. **Mark Bachmann**

**Intelligence** Liu Chuan is one of China's most exciting young directors, and this is a huge subject. **D**

**Equipped** How often have you not been told to be quiet, watch your eyes when your eyes are closed? **D**

**In Retrospect** One of the most powerful films you'll ever see. Literally unforgettable. **D**



## CENTURION

FRANK  
CASTLE

WHEN IT COMES TO  
BRITAIN, THE ROMANS  
WON. THE BRITISH, NOT SO MUCH.

**After *Dawg Soldiers*, *The Descent*** and *Centurion*, Neil Marshall continues to confound the rulebook of British cinema. *Centurion* sees an impressive roster of local actors preswagged into service as an unruly gaggle of Roman soldiers caught in an unreasonable war against the hostile Picts in the northernmost reaches of the empire.

It is here that General Virgus (Dominic West) and his Ninth Legion have been sent for the further glory of the motherland and here they will founder thanks to the scheming of mysterious, mute "she wolf" Ebor (Olga Kurylenko). It is here also that *Centurion*'s Quintus Dax (Michael Fassbender) will find himself caught between two cultures, in the thick of a bloody battle

from which it will take all his wits to escape alive.

Marshall is an unimpeachable movie lover, which is to say, he is a shameless plagiarist—he films filled with nods and winks to a raft of other (often better) films, most obviously here in *Centurion*'s evocation of *Gladiator*, and the helicopter shots stolen lock-stock from *The Lord of the Rings*. But Marshall's strength as a filmmaker is his ability to take the clichés and conventions of Hollywood action and remake them in a peculiarly British idiom. It's his potent mixture of deference and defiance that makes his imaginations as once fun and legible.

And *Centurion* is a chock-full of misapprehensions. Picts (Michael Fassbender's wobbly English accent "My name is Quintus

Dax... Begorrah!") to the tree-curling dialogue to the gleaming golden hair and perfectly painted lips of Brogan Potts' "sassy" Arian (because she's worth it), *Centurion* commits a litany of crimes, any one of which should be enough to land it in the movie slammer.

There are other, more fundamental problems, too. With the Ninth Legion routed, the narrative switches course, becoming a band-on-the-run thriller as the surviving Romans are hunted by the merciless Picts. And yet it's difficult to know who to root for. With their mud-splattered faces and grubby clothes, the Picts are presented as conventional movie-land guys, but it's the Romans who are the monstrous occupiers of this foreign land. Is this a political film in disguise, then? A contemporary

comment through ancient mouths? Hardly. Marshall is too busy lying on the chest to interrogate the movie's central ambivalence.

But even as the flicks fly, the accents crack and the audience groans, *Centurion* just about stays afloat. Because for all that it suffers from Marshall's customary weaknesses, it benefits from his signature verve, his mad ambition and wilful eye for violence. It may be cheap, but it's of a fine vintage. **Mark Buchhorn**

**Anticipation** Looks like one for the boys **D**

**Delight** It is one for the boys. And the drunks they use the more they enjoy it **D**

**In its element** Like what it makes another grandiose British action film in the wily short list **D**



FROM PAGE  
TO SCREEN

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## THE CRAZIES

**GRADE**  
R

**WATCH IT** For a  
thrilling look at a  
virus that's as scary as  
the people who spread it



## UNDER GREAT WHITE NORTHERN LIGHTS

**GRADE**  
R

**WATCH IT** For a  
thrilling look at a  
virus that's as scary as  
the people who spread it

With its premise taken from George A. Romero's 1973 horror classic of the same name, *The Crazies* will hardly win plaudits for originality. But as an updated account of a government's indifference and public hysteria it's fashionable at least. As the townsfolk of Opden Marsh, Iowa, begin exhibiting distressing symptoms of an unidentified affliction, Sheriff David Dutton (Timothy Olyphant) and his deputy (Joe Anderson) are called into action. With infection spreading like wildfire, the pair must move fast to protect their loved ones before the virus takes hold. It's hard to be wonned by films of this stature, especially when there are clichés at every turn and inconsequential characters crop up so opportunely, but go with it, as very worst it's still fun for the ride. **Adele Woodward** **D**

In 2007 *The White Snake* set out to play a series of impromptu gigs in the vast, unmaped frontier of northern Canada. There are moments here that capture a vast generational expanse in a world pressured by modernity: the young flinging themselves around, the old taciturn and demoted. But documentarian Emerson Malloy is far more concerned with exposing the marriages and misadventures in the heart of an organic relationship. Jack is a pure croquet. Meg, her burgeoning depression painfully apparent, smiles shrewdly and barely says a word. But paradoxically, the film is stronger for the fact that Malloy barely succeeds in revealing anything. Asked by Jack why the never says anything, Meg responds with honesty: "What can I say. I'm just quiet. You have nothing to do with it." **Toni Seymour** **D**



## IN THE LAND OF THE FREE

**GRADE**  
R

**WATCH IT** For a  
thrilling look at a  
virus that's as scary as  
the people who spread it



## THE INFIDEL

**GRADE**  
R

**WATCH IT** For a  
thrilling look at a  
virus that's as scary as  
the people who spread it

How could it be that in this day and age, three men can be kept in solitary confinement for over three decades? This powerful documentary from Nadine Joan tells the ongoing and acutely credible story of Herman Wilkoff, Albert Woodfox and Robert King, who between them have spent just under a century in solitary confinement at the Angola prison in Louisiana. Narrated by Samuel L. Jackson, the telling has a style of film-making, while occasionally slow-paced, is fanatically informative and shocking in its delivery. The result is a perfectly rounded and warmly sympathetic film, which carefully balances the facts of the case to provide an incredible insight into the inhuman sentencing and treatment of the Angola 3. **James Wright** **D**

David Buckle's first screenplay aims to get an uneasy laugh out of Muslim fundamentalism and anti-Semitism. David Djalil plays Mohamed Matar, a recreational Muslim who discovers he was born a Jew. Identity crisis underway: he enlists the help of his cabby neighbor (West Wing's Richard Schiff) who offers lessons in Jewishness - including how to perfect the Jewish shrug and all-important, or very, Messianic. His own family are being grilled on their "Muslimness" by his son's potential father-in-law (see *See Now Romance* named religious stereotypes). Bold in mission, less so in execution, only a few laughs escape from under the Jewish before this stereotypical satire makes a meandering pilgrimage to the final credits. Djalil plays the lovable fool to a tee, though. **Kat Holstead** **D**



## NIGHTWATCHING

GRADE  
BOMB

GRADE B  
A fine Danish  
feature that's  
a little better than  
any other.

Avant-garde innovator Peter Greenaway revisits his own art school background in this hybrid tale of the story behind Rembrandt's masterpiece "The Night Watch." Played out against a backdrop of overly theatrical tableaux and lit to resemble the moody darkness of the painting itself, *Nightwatching* is a noble experiment in bringing the inner life of Rembrandt's work sharply into focus, but the effect is one of supplying dullness. The heart of the narrative is Rembrandt's use of the painting to point the finger at the propagation of a series of vile crimes, but the drama itself is a disjointed medley of scenes and characters whose purpose and relation to one another is never entirely clear. And to cap it all, Martin Freeman gets his nob out. Nobody needed that. **Matt Boehnke** **D D D**



## CHERRYBOMB

GRADE  
BOMB

GRADE B  
A fine Danish  
feature that's  
a little better than  
any other.

An Irish monogamy combining *Skins* and *Rules of Attraction*, *Cherrybomb* is a schematic yet alluring portrait of teen delinquency where boredom, hormones and angst intersect as much as sex, drugs and rock 'n' roll. Draping glam onto the monochrome streets of Belfast, Kimberley Nixon McCabe plays the anti-heroine whose fraught relationship with her distant father (James Nesbitt) percolates a slow but determined wrapping of two local lads (Robert Sheehan and Rupert Grant) around each little finger. Although the characters are variations on a set theme—the former female; the rebel without a cause—persuasive performances, savvy editing and a modern score propel *Cherrybomb* forward. It is an unselfish, if disposable tribute to youthful insouciance. **Tom Seymour** **D D D**



## STORM

GRADE  
BOMB

GRADE B  
A fine Danish  
feature that's  
a little better than  
any other.

*Storm* brings together two of the most interesting talents in recent European cinema—Regency director Hans-Christian Schmid and *4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days* star Anamaria Marinca. Inspired by the Serbian War crimes trials, the film follows prosecutor Hannah Maynard (Kerry Fox) as she tries to persuade a young Bosnian woman (Marinca) to testify against an alleged war criminal. What makes it a complex emotional tangle for Maynard—whether to follow her own sense of justice or give way to the larger diplomatic negotiations at play. *Storm*'s contemporary setting adds intrigue to the criminal plotline, but despite convincing cast performances the film does have a whiff of TV drama about it, saved by the talent on display both in front of and behind the camera. **Aida Calise** **D D D**



## I KNOW YOU KNOW

GRADE  
BOMB

GRADE B  
A fine Danish  
feature that's  
a little better than  
any other.

Robert Carlyle struts about in double-breasted baggardsy in urban, Cuban heels and handlebar mache. It's 1988 and Charlie (Carlyle) is a wheeler-dealer. He knows everyone and handles everything, with doing son Jamie (Aaron Poole) permanently attached to his hip. But when they move to a dank Cardiff estate, Jamie is enrolled into a comprehensive that sets him broken up on a daily basis. Charlie assures him that soon they'll be off living the dream in America once he does a secret mission for a conspicuous businessman. But things change when Charlie begins to lose his grip on reality. This semi-autobiographical film by Juan Carrigan is dedicated to his own late father but a sadly his no order for too late to make you care about the characters or what happens to them. **Liamas Set** **D D D**



## THE KREUTZER SONATA

GRADE  
A-

WORTH A WATCHING  
REASON: It's a lush, lush  
film, with top acting.

## NO ONE KNOWS ABOUT PERSIAN CATS

GRADE  
A-

WORTH A WATCHING  
REASON: It's a lush, lush  
film, with top acting.

LA philosopher Ediger Hudson (Denny Hutton) meets and marries a beautiful pianist, Abby, played with evocative pleasure by Elisabeth Byles. Frustrated by family life, she grabs a chance to perform in a charity concert, whereupon Ediger becomes obsessed with the idea that she is having an affair with her musical partner. Ediger is never going to be particularly likable – he acknowledges unashamedly that he's vain – and while Hutton has a burgeoning career as the son of character actor Hollywood canonically makes in (see his performance as Colonel Stryker in *X-Men Origins: Wolverine* and upcoming roles in *Clash of the Titans* and *Robin Hood*), he makes hard work of this, not least because of his intense, porous voiceover. Shocking as the ending is, it's fudged, too. **Jonas Mink** **000**

Given that Iran's headline authorities vowed to stamp out all Western influences after the 1979 Islamic revolution, the local MTV station surely never opened. Which makes *Persian Cats* all the more interesting. Behnam Ghobadi's film full-length feature unravels Tehran's underground music scene, revealing a pulsating world of rappers, indie kids and their families forced to practice in dingy basements and hide their NMEs from the law. Based on actual events, the story follows Ashkan and Nasser, musicians on a quest to pursue their careers away from such restrictions. As they hunt down the best music and life prospects needed to escape, Tehran quickly emerges as the unexpected star, the colourful backdrop for a series of beautifully shot music videos that bind the film together. **Alan Rimmer** **000**



## PERRIER'S BOUNTY

GRADE  
A-

WORTH A WATCHING  
REASON: It's a lush, lush  
film, with top acting.

## MICMACS

GRADE  
A-

WORTH A WATCHING  
REASON: It's a lush, lush  
film, with top acting.

Wearing its influences as its sleeve, *Perrier's Bounty* is back-ended with *Big Lebowski*-style narration and padded out with a cast of inconspicuous thugs snatched from Guy Ritchie's milieu. And thanks to Jim Fforestbert's charming portrait of a father (complete with soliciting Dublin accent) and Cillian Murphy as his long-suffering son, the film takes as much from the family dynamics of *Indiana Jones* and *The Lost Crusade* as it does from *Pulp Fiction*'s grit. Murphy plays a waster with a heart of gold who gets himself in an inescapable mess after he fails to pay back a measly £1,000. Generic gangster violence ensues, frustratingly overshadowing a far more engaging dynamic between father and son. **Georgie Hobbie** **000**

Jean-Pierre Jeunet may be one of France's most bankable directors, but he's never been one to hurry his muse. *Micmacs* is only his third film in 10 years, and it doesn't represent a huge departure from the oeuvre. But that's no bad thing. The tale of a video-store clerk out to seek revenge on the same companies that have left him with a bullet lodged permanently in his skull has the same zany spirit, detailed production design and visual wit as both *A Very Long Engagement* and *Amélie*, but it also has a more relevant social punch. Dany Boon (thank Jim Carrey in his heyday) gives a tremendous physical performance in the lead, but the gorgeous sets and inventive sequences are the real stars of the show. Jeunet's films don't sit easily in these cynical times, but they're more necessary now than ever. **Danny Bagg** **000**



## SALVAGE

LEADS  
SALLY  
KILPATRICK

WRITER/DIRECTOR  
LAWRENCE GORAH  
STARRING  
NINA GOLD, NICKY KATT  
RATES  
SALLY KILPATRICK

Thrilling to writer/director Lawrence Gorah. After cutting his teeth on a series of horror shorts, he's got a good cast and healthy budget together for this feature debut, set in a besieged community. *Salvage* is a very literal discussion of social breakdown, government secrets and neighbors from hell, with a gutsy lead performance from Nina Gold as a single mom trying to protect her daughter when a living nightmare erupts in their small estate. But, by fuck, it's a stupid, insane Neil Marshall without the visual wit or caper-movie ambition and you're only part way to understanding just how preposterous this is. Still, tech credits are genuinely quite impressive (despite the ugly DV) and horror fans will enjoy the gore, if not the emergency stop climax. **Matt Boehnen** **👍👍👍**



## HAPPY EVER AFTERS

LEADS  
SALLY  
KILPATRICK

WRITER/DIRECTOR  
ALICE COLE  
STARRING  
ALICE COLE, JAMES GUNN  
RATES  
SALLY KILPATRICK

*Happy Ever Afters* is further proof that America need not fear for its hold over the film comedy market. With the British only finding the magic formula on the small screen, this offering from our Irish cousins reduces our inability to translate "funny" into a feature length quest. The film plays out over the course of two weddings, unrelated except for their shared choice of reception venue and ill-advised relationships. As the cinematic cliche - irony! - and relationships slowly unravel, *Happy Ever Afters* does nothing to diminish the stereotype of the Irish as amiable heavy drinkers, nor does it push the boundaries of its encyclopedic comedy inspirations. As such, it's hard to care about the neurotic relationships and slapstick scenarios the film presents. **Alice Cole** **👍👍👍**



## FROM PARIS WITH LOVE

LEADS  
SALLY  
KILPATRICK

WRITER/DIRECTOR  
JOHN TRAVOLTA  
STARRING  
JOHN TRAVOLTA, CHARLIZE THERON  
RATES  
SALLY KILPATRICK

John Travolta as Charlie Wang: a slick talking, dap-headed CIA operator whose methods are anything but by the book. On his last peace mission through the Persian underworld, our primely gaudied journey is paired with a go-getting agency gofer (Charlize Theron) who quickly learns that in the world of War, formalities are surplus. The only requirements here are an itch trigger finger and a ruthless disposition. In his most self-referential run to date, Travolta bears no blushes for the fact that he's clearly wishing turning back the clock to his old and take masters. For all its absurdism (and there are plenty), as a chutz boxing high-octane romp, *From Paris With Love* is as entertaining and gratifying as they come. **Adam Woodward** **👍👍👍**

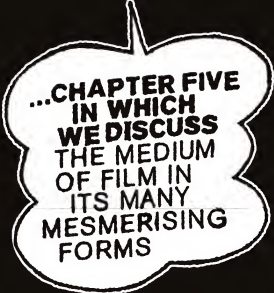


## LEAP YEAR

LEADS  
SALLY  
KILPATRICK

WRITER/DIRECTOR  
ALICE COLE  
STARRING  
ALICE COLE, JAMES GUNN  
RATES  
SALLY KILPATRICK

Type a personality Anna (Amy Adams, whose character bears the hallmarks of all modern romantic comedy heroines - perfection, her obsessive-compulsive tendencies and contemplating her obligatory childhood trauma) encounters unlikely Irish charmer Declan (Matthew Goode) while en route to Dublin to propose to her boyfriend on Leap Day. A meet not so cute as *Dingle & I* followed by denial of said meet cute as Anna and Declan romp about from one "bizarre" mishap to the next. Adams and Goode are hampered by a wobbly script, which aims for *It Happened One Night* cross country battle-of-the-sexes entertainment but treats the mark so completely (it isn't even a leap year!) it makes you long for Matthew McConaughey to turn up just so you have something to laugh at. **Alice Levick** **👍👍👍**



**...CHAPTER FIVE  
IN WHICH  
WE DISCUSS  
THE MEDIUM  
OF FILM IN  
ITS MANY  
MESMERISING  
FORMS**

THE

# BACK SECTION

28



WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY MITCH BLUMET

# AND THE WINNER IS...?



**Q**ues. Then, we said it. It's been a pretty rare role of this magazine that we don't mention the Oscars. Frustrated at the way they dominate the movie landscape, we made a decision long ago to act as if they didn't exist. But as Hollywood's big night looms, we alone sit hardened backs to break this self-imposed silence and question whether the whole awards palaver might not be such a bad thing after all.

**A**ll The Oscars are bad for film because they do the opposite to what they intend to do. Rather than shining a light on the best of film in a given year, they narrow the focus to a few familiar, almost pre-selected films. Oscars...

**A**ll It would be a mistake to think that the Oscars or any awards body is going to come up with the best film of the year because there's just no such thing. It is a non-existent entity. What awards ceremonies do is take a slice of opinion from a certain period in time.

**A**ll But it's never treated like that. The mainstream media treat it like the grade deciding the best film of the year. And yet all Oscar prognosticators talk about is how a film's publicist has played this kind of political game. It's not even a truth thing anymore; it's a very naked acceptance that the Oscars are a political entity.

**A**ll But the Oscars are primarily an industry occasion. It's an excuse to congratulate themselves, and I don't think the general public comes into the equation too much. I don't think it's damaging to film, because you can carry on pushing the smaller stuff you like better if...

**A**ll But the Oscars make it harder for us to have the conversation we want to have. It's harder to keep on pushing the small movies because of this oxygen of publicity.

**A**ll But the public like what they know to some extent, so unless you can really give them a reason to see this excellent new small movie rather than Brad Pitt's one vehicle...

**A**ll But it's a circular thing. The public like what they know but they're constantly being given the same thing. They're getting Oscar-entrusted stuff from November through to March. Anything new or original or distinct gets portrayed by the Oscar shadow. It's like it has its own gravitational pull that sucks everything into itself.

**A**ll You seem to be saying that the Oscar nominations are announced and every one lays down and says, 'Oh, that's it.' But the opposite is true, and everyone usually says, 'That was crap. This was wrong for this reason. Why have they ignored this film?' That's something we want to do, isn't it?

**A**ll The other thing you have to take into account is who the Oscars are voted by. The Academy is about 6,000 members, many of whom are doddering, faded Hollywood birds who are rewarded with having the popular vote.

**A**ll They are not awarding them for the viewing public. It's an industry shindig projected on a global scale. I don't think people will go and see a film because it has won a Turner of Golden...

**J**W If you look at what is within about the Oscars, especially in the US, it's not

actually that much to do with the films. It's about who's presenting, who's got the best jokes, who's wearing who's dress on the way in or how their hair is done. The show of it has become more important now.

**T**S You've got to remember that all of these events are emblematic of the industry they represent and the industry is notoriously repetitive and forever looking and efforts to break into it's not surprising the events are like that. In fact, it's almost inevitable.

**A**ll Another problem with all awards ceremonies is that it is much more likely for a consensus to emerge as time that the majority of people have seen. That is inevitable. In a sense, we seem to be objecting about some of the inherent problems with the way democracy works. Obviously people take a vote, some are disappointed, others aren't. Some sort of consensus is inevitably reached but it's not going to be some kind of true answer to the question that was originally posed.

**A**ll Here is a good model for an awards show: don't vote. Every single person should have their own award where you say, 'This is what I think is the best film,' and forget about the whole democracy thing. And then you will have six billion awards shows and they will all be considered equal.

**A**ll Yeah but we already do have that; it's called the world.

**C**heck out the **1st conversation online**. And don't miss our Oscar feature on March 7.

**W**ITHIN *Heavy Metal, James Earl Ray, Martin Luther King, George Bush, Tom Sawyer, Jonathan Williams*





# JEAN-STEPHANE SAUVAIRE

THE DIRECTOR OF *JOHNNY MADO DOG*  
SPEAKS TO EW.COM AHEAD OF THE  
FILM'S DVD RELEASE ON MARCH 15





**LM/Flan** Tell us about the genesis of *Johnny Mad Dog*.

**Sassano** I was working for 10 years as an AD on films in France, but I had this film project I wanted to do in Colombia, based on the boys who were killing for Pablo Escobar. In 2000, I stopped working as an AD and I went to Colombia. We tried to shoot in Medellín but Medellín was quite... tough. In France, they told me that they would not give me the money because they didn't know if I would come back alive. One of the boys I had found for the casting had been shot, so finally the producer told me, 'I don't want to stay. If you want to follow this project, do the film alone, but I will go back to France because I have a kid.'

**LM/Flan** But you discovered Johnny Chino Mechuco, Emmanuel Danguela's book, and resurrected the project using that as the source material.

**Sassano** Yes. First I went to Kinshasa, many times, and I met some guys there. But you know in Kinshasa the child soldiers were fighting in 1990, so they were too old in 2004 to act in the film. I needed some

young actors who had been child soldiers. Finally I went to Liberia in 2004. It was a year after the war I wanted to do this film with real child soldiers, and not in Senegal or in South Africa where there was some infrastructure for the movie.

**LM/Flan** But they were happy to do it? There is still a guilt and anger attached to former child soldiers.

**Sassano** When I met these boys and told them that I was doing this film about child soldiers somewhere in Africa during a war, they told me, 'If you do this film, it's our story.' I spent most of 2005 going back and forth to Liberia, and I started casting because I thought for this film it was important to find the right boys. But it wasn't easy. You can't make an announcement on the radio asking for former child soldiers.

**LM/Flan** But you found the group.

**Sassano** Fifteen boys. And they were the unit I created a house in Monrovia and I put the boys there for a year to prepare them for this film, because they were child soldiers, but they had to become actors.

**LM/Flan** It's a surprise that the government were so keen to let you film there. Films like *Blood Diamond* can be quite damaging to the image of countries that are recovering from civil war and trying to attract tourists and investors.

**Sassano** At the beginning of 2004 I saw that it was impossible to do the film in Liberia, so I thought that maybe I could do the film in Sierra Leone. I felt that the people on the streets there wanted to do it, but the government told me, 'We don't know, the war is finished. If you want to do a love story, you can come. But a war film?' I tried to tell them if I want to shoot a film about Sierra Leone, I can do it in Monrovia. If I want to do it and shoot in Sierra Leone, it's because I want to be sincere. They didn't really react well to the proposal, so I went back to Liberia and I met the Minister of Culture and Tourism. He told me, 'If you do this film, you have to come to Liberia - we have to do this film together. We want to have a testimonial of the situation in Liberia, we have to prove that now the war is over and the country is able to have this movie, that it's stable enough to do this.' **RETURN**



# DAVID MORRISSEY



DAVID MORRISSEY'S MALLEABLE FACE HAS BEEN BARS TO AVOID LATELY, HANGING FROM A SELEBRITIAL WORLD-WE TIME LONG INER, WHO TO A VIGOROUSLY CROAKY DOPPELGÄNGER IN KEVIN SPACE, AND LEONARD'S MOTHER'S BEST FRIEND IN AN ANTI-CLIMAX, HIS MOST FEATURE AS A DIRECTOR, SOFT MURDER ABOUT ME. BUT IN 2010, HE WAS MARCO, A KID MICRO-BUDGET THRILLER TO HIS NATIVE LIVERPOOL, WHERE LONDON LAB RAVES (PLAYED BY JAMES MORRIS) BLOWS A POTENTIAL ROMANCE.

**EWING:** David is not the sort of actor you usually see on screen, especially in a leading man. He's got the blunt confidence that works in clubs for one night stands...

**MORRISSEY:** Yeah, I think he's a real character. I've not making a Richard Gere film. It's not a romance in that way. They are not compatible - that's important. Life isn't easy in that way. This is a story about a girl who meets this guy and she's able to understand himself in everything else's been carrying for a long time. It has to be someone who doesn't care about others; she wouldn't tell him. Whether you like him or not is very personal. He's very irresponsible for me. There are aspects of me in him that are incredible. selfish. And I'd love her to be with Colin Firth, but that's not my movie.

**EWING:** Nice Liverpool, a hard place to start from to become an actor?



**MORRISSEY:** I was there in the cinema when saying, 'Is my movie ever did I expect to be an actor was like saying I wanted to be an astronaut; but there was a thing about the city and still is, that anything was achievable - that the streets I was walking down had been walked down by men who had become the centre of the universe.'

**EWING:** When you went to RADA in London did you feel it was trying to rub off some of what you'd come to want?

**MORRISSEY:** I felt that really. And it wasn't true. RADA was actually trying to give me a basic for a career in acting. I was coming at them with my character, which was a cheeky Glasgow boy. They said, 'Why don't you play this old guy in a Restoration comedy?' It was to do with feeling that people couldn't put me in a box. Sometimes it drove people mad. They say 'Who is he?' They know my performance but they don't know me. You wouldn't see my characters in *Nowhere Boy* and *Is Anybody There?* are a similar person. There's a sense that not the same actor.

**EWING:** Is it true that Rex was a crucial film for you?

**MORRISSEY:** Yeah, it was. Because I couldn't see where it began and where it finished. It was like watching people I knew. I wasn't safe watching it. I wasn't in my chair watching it. It was slightly inside me. It made me look at my life differently. Yeah, it really upset me in a real way. The injustice of it was what got me. And I thought, 'Well, that's life. You fight for justice or whatever you want to call it, but actually you're never satisfied when it's not there. Given the nature of who I am, things like that affect me in my way about a group of working class men from the north. But I read a thing about the Cambridge spies, and there's a sense of injustice and lost ideology there. I respond to just as much.

**EWING:** Rex Rex? Rex's glowing, dark earth in the 70s something you remembered?

**MORRISSEY:** I really remembered it, yeah. I remember those being my first in life. The books are alright, but Terry O'Connell's descriptions are brilliant. They're about the best thing any of a certain kind of northern men, feeling on a scale which was being crushed away from them - that role of miserable northern, hard-drinking, hard-smoking backlanders. If you walked into a pub from somewhere else then you'd know it.

WORDS NICK HASTED



# DVD LISTINGS

AVAILABLE MARCH 1

## STORAGE

DIRECTED BY MICHAEL CRAFT (2001)

Following his father's death, Jerry (Matthew Scully) works at his uncle's underground storage facility where some sinister goings-on take place. This Australian horror is a promising premise well served by bad acting, predictable plotting and, despite the film's claustrophobic setting, a palpable lack of atmosphere. You'll see one fairly ridiculous plot twist coming from miles away. **D**

## CHAW

DIRECTED BY SEUN JEONG WOO (2000)

It may lack the gravity of *Bandersnatch* (1984), the eccentric mythology of *Poison Moon* (1997), or the political allegory of *Pyromaniac* (2000), but *Chaw* brings a taut-sharp combination of poetic, parody and paroxysmal grotesqueness to the whole glacial killer tale subgenre. Think *Jaws*, only in the Korean backwoods. **B**

## TOWER OF LONDON

DIRECTED BY EDWARD Y. LEE (1999)

Trading moments for moments, director Edward Y. Lee makes *Sen of Frankenstein* stars Basil Rathbone and Boris Karloff for a gleefully ghoulish view of England's lively history. The film follows Richard, Duke of Gloucester (Rathbone), and his club-footed henchman Mord (Karloff) as they plot and murder their way to the throne. **B**

## AN INSPECTOR CALLS

DIRECTED BY GUY HAMILTON (1964)

Adapted from J.R. Forsythe's classic drawing room drama, *An Inspector Calls* is a seething indictment of bourgeoisie Edwardian society that follows police inspector investigation of a group of wealthy dinner party guests as he implicates each of them in the suicide of a young, poverty-stricken girl. **A**

## LUCÍA

DIRECTED BY HUBERTO SOKO (1968)

Slipping across time and class barriers, Humberto Soko's line of vision from late socialism and twentieth-century Cuba shows a country and a people adjusting to recurrent war and revolution. Three women – all called Lucía – living in 1955-1952 and the 1960s follow their men to death, despair and emancipation. **B**

AVAILABLE MARCH 6

## I THINK WE'RE ALONE NOW

DIRECTED BY SEAN CONNELLY (1990)

Strikers may not be an obvious reference point for heart-breaking comedy, but that's exactly what's on the menu in Sean Connolly's current examination of two people – a 53-year-old Asperger's sufferer and thirty-something homophobe – obsessed with '80s pop sensation Tiffany Townsend. **B**

AVAILABLE MARCH 15

## SURVIVAL OF THE DEAD

DIRECTED BY GEORGE A. ROMERO (2000)

In the north branchline of the Dead family, civil Irish patriarchy confronts a zombie incursion, off the coast of Delaware. Gore ensues, but Romero forgives to bring the trademark brand of social commentary to the undead plane. **B**

## KISSES

DIRECTED BY LANCE DOLY (2000)

Acoustic furyride with outstanding breakthrough performance from young indie Kelly O'Neill and Shane Curry. Neglected and viewed. Kyle and Dylan escape for one night to Dublin searching for Dylan's runaway brother. Winner of Best Director for Lance Doly at the Irish Film and Television Awards. **B**

AVAILABLE MARCH 22

## BODYSONG

DIRECTED BY SIMON FOWELL (2002)

Archive footage of the different stages of human life spliced together to the music of Redhead guitarist Johnny Greenwood. Released before the advent of widescreen and online video, director Simon Fowell's deconstruction of his film as 'a terror of humanity larger than any of us can conceive sounds quieter with each YouTube upload. **B**

## THE HIGH COMMAND

DIRECTED BY THOROLD DICKINSON (1936)

Starring 1930s horror regular Lionel Atwill as a disoriented British Army General whose mysterious past comes back to haunt him, this tale of bloodlust and betrayal in colonial Africa is chiefly notable for an appearance by a young James Mason. **B**

## BITCH SLAP

DIRECTED BY RICH JACOBSON (1980)

Three lesbian lesbians/high-kicking women experts double-cross their way through a series of desert-baked stand-offs in an overly derivative, deeply flawed and overlong teen-exploitation workhorse. Roger Corman's early Rick Jacobson film just about succeeds despite itself. **D**

AVAILABLE MARCH 29

## HIGHLY STRUNG

DIRECTED BY SOPHIE LALAY (2000)

Having relocated in Lyon to study music, Marie comes to with childhood friend Gwen. The distant feature from writer-director Sophie Lalay is not dissimilar to *Neige On A Scarle*: both in the slow burning sexuality that emerges between the pair, and the corner of the privacy of deserted apartments and public spaces. **B**

## BEFORE I FORGET

DIRECTED BY JACQUES ROBERT (2007)

At an impasse with a novel, aging Pauline goes to France to visit on his life through a series of encounters with old friends and the occasional lover. This drama is a frilly written and directed by Jacques Robert and in which he also plays the lead, is perhaps the most sensitive – the sadness of the subject carried by a disarming honesty and awkward moments of well-observed comedy. **B**

AVAILABLE APRIL 5

## IMAGES

DIRECTED BY GUSTAV NITMAR (1977)

In Robert Altman's psychomaniac thriller, Samson (Yark) plays a woman plagued by visions, including adulterous relations with her neighbor. Unknowingly he husband Rene Aubrey (James) these visions seem rare incidents with Yark increasingly failing to distinguish between fact and fiction. Yark won the Best Actress trophy at Cannes for this '70s gem. **A**

## LE PROFESSIONNEL

DIRECTED BY GEORGES LANTIER (1981)

Based on author Patrick Alexander's second-world novel (adapted by Jacques Audier), New Wave superior Jean-Paul Belmondo plays the professional of the title, a silent agent who is sent to kill an African president. But while on route, elegance changes and the French government's warlord has to the authorities. Belmondo's mission is now to escape, and choose his allegiance. **B**

## VENGEANCE

DIRECTED BY JEFFREY TAYLOR (1981)

A Portia renaissance view to escape the death of his daughter a family after they are slain in Hong Kong. Notion: action director Taylor teams up with memorable and French pop king Johnny Hallyday as a tale of revenge, violence and melodrama. **B**

AVAILABLE APRIL 12

## CLANDESTINOS

DIRECTED BY ANTONIO REYES (1987)

Maria is concerned with the Cuban film that shares its title: there's an interesting premise of European terrorism post-9/11 buried in the middle of a plot that fights his region. Unfortunately Antonio Reyes is unable to capture the depths of memorable European terrorism. Xela with the elements of such a drama. **D**

## SEX LIVES IN LA

DIRECTED BY JOSEPH WICK (1981)

This two-part documentary takes a look at the early underworld of the gay porn scene in Los Angeles. Filmed in 1967 and 2005, Joseph Wick informs the viewer's lifestyle of a group of young porn stars whose thirst for fame is compromised by an industry riddled with deceit, dishonesty and AIDS. It's a bold, brutalized and, more often than not, sore checked. **B**

## PRODUCING ADULTS

DIRECTED BY ALBERT SALMERON (1984)

A tender French film about a couple whose unconventional conception process involves a relationship someone to surface, along with some unexpected pre-pregnancy baggage. Robert Salmeron studies sexual education and the perplexities of human nature and desire with a quick wit and plenty of heart. **B**

## HIERRO

DIRECTED BY CARLOS LOPEZ (1989)

A mother searches for her missing son in this psychological thriller. Elena Anaya (winner of the Best Actress award at *Stages*) plays a mother haunted by nightmare sightings of her son, who disappeared on a winter walk on a visit to the Spanish coast of Hierro. *Don't Look Now* meets *Amélie* in this tale of grief and madness. **B**

AVAILABLE APRIL 19

## THE EROTIC FILMS OF PETER DE NOBRE

DIRECTED BY PETER DE NOBRE (1972)

Early shorts from the 1970s. Ben of Dango, who would later go on to pioneer the gay horror movement. As early as they are cheap Peter De Nobre's two-reelers (gay) are incredibly knowing, cheeky, funny and subtle. Withings against tastefully subtle backgrounds. *Never have off-camera scenes so much.* **B**

## LATE SPRING

DIRECTED BY TONY GUNN (1981)

In this dramatic drama, a post-war family's unconventional disposition is revealed by the traditional tapestry to marry, with intense results. Love is in the air even as Don's camera remains still. **B**

## EARLY SUMMER

DIRECTED BY TONY GUNN (1981)

Here, as in Don's earlier *Late Spring*, Maria Salmeron plays an unconventional woman named Maria, but *Early Summer* is, in keeping with the shift in seasons, an altogether lighter, brighter effort. **B**

## TOKYO STORY

DIRECTED BY YASUJIRO OZU (1953)

Ozu's measured family drama is a model of restraint and witless that makes a real emotional punch. No wonder that it frequently features amongst critics' top five greatest films. Unmistakable. **A**

## VIGO

DIRECTED BY ALLEN KAPLAN (1986)

The son of a murdered merchant Juan Vigo was destined for a rough life. A lonely child and inheritor of his father's life, he lived his years and doctors until he was blue in the face. Literally. Juan Vigo's reason in *Vigo's* work on top of some gorgeous location shots in this study, if somewhat clichéd, tragic. **B**

**WHEELS**  
*Rollin'...*

# **KNIGHT RIDERS**

(1981)





**WORDS BY**

KEVIN LEE DOWDY

**DIRECTED BY**

WILLIAM A. KATZ

**STARRING**

JO HARRIS, THUNDERBOLT, AND INTERMIX

**BOX NOTABLES**

PAINT A THUNDERBOLT SCENE

**TAGLINE**

THUNDERBOLT IS A SHOCK OF SKIN

**TRAILERS**

THE REPORT OF BO-BO BO-BO

MADE A GRAVE FOR CHARLIE

**CHERRYPICK**

"I'D LOVE TO BE A THUNDERBOLT AND INTERMIX. I'D LOVE TO BE A THUNDERBOLT AND INTERMIX. I'D LOVE TO BE A THUNDERBOLT AND INTERMIX. I'D LOVE TO BE A THUNDERBOLT AND INTERMIX."



Meaning a crossed sword and a look of resigned confusion, Ed Harris is the King Arthur figure to a traveling band of motorcycle riding and casually fastidious punting on accidental fates of fast-food junkies and overused musicians in this spacially weird retelling of the Camelot legend from horror hero George Romero.

It's difficult to fathom how a stretched-out like Harris came to be burning around with this bunch of misquoting chaps and female intellectuals, but then, perhaps, his conflation as Italian-greek-style leaderlike is just what this need. Oh, Ed may talk about a vague and largely untheorized code of values and then all the trappings of capitalism, but he's not aware of being warped on hand-and-foot by the sorts of his counter-culture while riding—top of the range Japanese motorcycle. And the happy part of it?

Unfortunately, even in a delicately veiled-to-disappoint hierarchy such as this, when a cast of hundreds are playing in crowds of half a dozen, there is always going to be a problem balancing the books. So when vicious promoter Joe Bonomo of Silver Bullet Enterprises (labeled by Martin Scorsese, the wacky lawyer from *Jurassic Park*) offers the film *Thunderbolt* and *Intermix* characters a big money shot at their own *Thunderbolt* type TV show, the *Thunderbolt* business has a dollar to lose.

Saving *Thunderbolt*'s secret of brotherhood and self-sacrificed moral crusade betrayed, Harris sets to racing and saving like a showman's garden. Indeed, it's only the pharmaceutical entrepreneurs of a war-torn world (played by Harvard folk historian Bonomo [Blue in the only film role]) that keep him from coming entirely unglued.

But the day after the *Thunderbolt* proves itself for his highly desired *Thunderbolt* cannot last the conspiracy of the big cable liberal minds he chooses to stay with, while Morgan finds the girl, glamour and studied posing postures of promise relevant more a trouble than they're worth. But, consequently, return to the *Thunderbolt* scene of *Thunderbolt*.

And the night has been a good place to wrap things up. But it's just after the boys return to the fold that the film takes a slightly sinister turn. Any thought of the comedy continuing to perform a new genre into an unforgiving regimen of weapons racing and half-life programming. Every member of the troupe is singled in a chaotic, chaotic manner, as what appeared at the outset to be nothing more than a bunch of grossly feathered and theatricality is transformed into a repressive, private, public, declared as the side of returning America to some wholly imagined *Thunderbolt* shape.

It's a truly unusual film that can go to the heart of war-torn destruction and one-chilling violence and yet still find time in its loose, wandering script for lengthy and disarmingly frank campfire discussions about why the entertainment profession should attract as many emotional workers as well as aggressive, aggressive, road-trip through the *Thunderbolt* desert in which the plot takes a back seat to scenery and war music.

And though it all *Thunderbolt* proved not only a war-torn destruction and one-chilling violence and yet still find time in its loose, wandering script for lengthy and disarmingly frank campfire discussions about why the entertainment profession should attract as many emotional workers as well as aggressive, aggressive, road-trip through the *Thunderbolt* desert in which the plot takes a back seat to scenery and war music.







# THE ARCHIVE

# No. 3

# IRMA

# VEP

# 1996

A legendary early masterpiece of French cinema, *Les Vampires* follows the exploits of a nefarious band of master criminals led by the daring, hair-raised *homme fatal* Jean Vep (an assemblage of "vampires"). Making Paris its new grip of terror, the underworld gang are pursued across the city by heroic journalist Philippe Guennec and his selected Muscades. Reflecting the impact of fear and anxiety in World War I-era France, and shot entirely in and around the streets of early 20th-century Paris, the 12-part silent serial from the pioneer Louis Feuillade (director of the equally acclaimed *Pathéphone*) proved instrumental in the development of the crime and gangster genres.

Having established himself as a filmmaker reluctant to easy categorization, Oliver Assayas returned to Feuillade's anti-hero for *Les Vep*, the film with which the former *Catfish* director and one-time André Tichauer script collaborator considered his cinematic renaissance.

Originating from a planned collaboration between Assayas, Claire Denis and Arnaud Egger, who shared a desire to explore the situation of a foreigner within the contemporary French capital, Assayas persisted with the project as a solo venture and is doing so perfectly depicted the situation of transcontinental drift and alienation. Moreover, in referencing Feuillade and a much-chartered period in French cinema,

Assayas also created a witty, anemic and satirical dialogue with cinema history (French and otherwise) and with the frequently frustrating practice of filmmaking itself.

While *Vu*lva's 1972 *Day For Night* in close association with the postwar neorealism movement, Assayas also traces Werner Fassbinder's *Love in a Hot Place* from 1971 on the greater inspiration, even toxicity for its audience of the myth of filmmaking for something far closer to the reality. It is further and to the film, Assayas also casts one of its stars, Luce Corlet. The DIC's 1981 comic drama *Liberty* is *Vu*lva's another counterpart.

A figure whose reputation has long since diminished, director René Vidal (*Jean-Pierre L'Éclair*, one of the leading lights of the French New Wave) reputationally casts Hong Kong action star and four-time *James Bond* star Moustache Cheung as the modern day replacement for original *Les Vep* star Moustache. In his thought-defyingly serene re-make of *Les Vampires*, Luce Corlet, the star and groom her minor might afford, Cheung, despite her familiarity with her colleagues, her language and her general surroundings, and her own enigmatic smile at her suitability for the part, throws herself into the venture with gusto, even donning the famous cat suit (think Michelle Pfeiffer in *Batman Returns*) for one of the film's most iconic sequences in which – in true *Les Vep*

style – she is literally *only* as expensive as her expensive jewelry (which is right at her increasingly visible, Cheung also finds herself having to understand the level of her own character (Michelle Pfeiffer), a likely association's role (Michelle Pfeiffer) and the increasingly realistic Vidal.

Offering perhaps the most legible example of Assayas' exceptionally fluid visual style and his exemplary use of contemporary music (Scottie Young features, as does Louis's early film version of Serge Gainsbourg's "Belle et Dédé"), the film-making and deeply informed *Les Vep* engages on numerous levels.

As a film, a discourse on cultural collision and erosion, a history lesson, and also an indictment of the increasingly binary post-modernist take on sexual representation, human relationships and shared experiences (in adding these to the director's work), the film also marked the beginning of a personal relationship between Assayas and Cheung. The pair started in 1995, divorced three years later, but still came together to collaborate again on the equally accomplished *Green*.

WORDS JASON WOOD

# the FRONTLINE

## LAWRENCE PEARCE'S DIARIES OF A MOVIE INSIDER...

Keeping with the focus of this issue, I thought I would use this column to explore some advice I produced over for a fellow screenwriter who sought me out like a model me with this request: I am working on a screenplay and now thinking about trying to make it into a graphic novel. I was wondering if you had any advice?

When I first decided to adapt the feature film screenplay at *Comic Awakening* into a graphic novel, my thought process was quite primitive to say the least. On a rock-Tarzan voice inside my head, something like this: script not have money for movie, think comic-book fan, we make money, comic-book not sell and give film money.

If only it was that easy! While I am used to translating a vision to those who are living about my wishes on a film set (actors, DP, art designers, etc.) it's an environment where I'm present to watch over their work. If what they're producing isn't quite what I have in mind, I can intercept and modify. With my comic-book artist, the talented David Bawden (Bawden's Law, 2000 AC), I had no investment trust and relinquish more control, as the comic-book industry has a culture of visuals

and colours and designs where the artist is often the writer's creative equal.

Once the graphic novel was completed and held in my hands, I then had the task of selling it to a comic-book publisher. Looking at the amazing quality of the artwork and what I believed to be a pretty good story, I didn't think there would be too much difficulty in finding a buyer. Wrong. What I hadn't considered a year earlier was what conditions the comic-book industry was in and what prerequisites were needed for a project to be bought by a publisher.

On creative types are rarely good at business and this was a major flaw in my business plan or lack of one. The comic-book industry is struggling - big time. Sales over the past few years have plummeted, even if the new in comic-book genres suggests otherwise. The comic-book as genre gone by was on and is dead! now it is merely a cheap window for Hollywood to ignore.

Can I *Awakening* struggle to find real interest among the big publishers such as Dark Horse, DC and IDW, mainly because the film rights were not available with the actual graphic novel itself. I

was determined to keep hold of the film rights as that was the initial reason for producing the book. If I gave the film rights away then the publisher would not have rights on it. Hollywood, and I'd be cut out of the picture. I refused. The publishers all declined. Henry McMahon, owner of Madhouse Entertainment, said to me: "Don't feel too bad, you don't have a superhero as the lead, or a well-known character or franchise involved, and you're not a famous writer with a big fan following, so you didn't really have much chance anyway." Oh, good.

Dan Schiller, talented writer/artist of numerous books including *Dead Wink* and *The Breaker*, and someone who believed in the comic-book industry, once told me over a greasy all-day breakfast in a Croydon pub: "The comic-book industry sucks. There's no money in it. That's why I'm writing for movies now - it's much easier." I remembered that. Movies much easier? We struggling screenwriter is going to believe that one. I wonder if the guy who wrote to me asking for advice will

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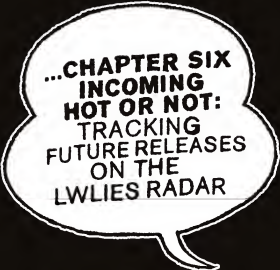
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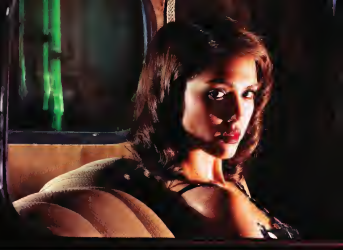


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## SUNDANCE ROUND-UP

TRICKING THE PLUMMERS AND  
POKERS FROM THE CREAM OF THE  
INDIESPHERE AS THEY DECAMP  
TO PARK CITY, UTAH, FOR THE  
SUNDANCE FILM FESTIVAL.

## THE KILLER INSIDE ME

**DIRECTED BY** *James Watkins* **ON THE TV**

One of two British directors with controversial films at this year's Sundance (the other was Clint McKinnon with suicide-bomber comedy *Four Lions*), *Watkins* borrows a serial killer flick's ruffled feathers with its repeatedly shocking scenes of domestic violence. If you can stomach it, star Gaele Affleck gives a harrowing lead performance.

## WINTER'S BONE

**DIRECTED BY** *Debra Granik* **ON TV**

This harrowing, minimalist drama about a girl who travels across the Ozark mountains to find her drug-dealing father won the Grand Jury Prize this year, as did such like-a-cross-between-*Into the Wild* and *Tideland*.

## TUCKER & DALE VS EVIL

**DIRECTED BY** *Colin Hanks* **ON SCREEN**

This horror indie spoofs the slash-gore genre by showing the action from the perspective of two dumb hillbilly murderers. Think a sounds-crap? Then check out the genuinely hilarious trailer. A successful showing at Sundance should bring a summer release.

## CYRUS

**DIRECTED BY** *Jeffrey Friedman* **ON TV**

This story of a man who courts the women of his dreams—and her damaged son—could easily have played like a dumb comedy. Instead, *Sundance* makes suggest it's a revealingly well-acted drama about a dysfunctional family, starring Maria Tormo and Jonah Hill.

## CATFISH

**DIRECTED BY** *Ned Zeman, long just ON TV*

This documentary had critics at Sundance buzzing. The tale of a self-absorbed L.A. photographer who travels to Michigan to see a family he has met online, no one is sure if it's real or faked. Either way, it's meant to be unmissable.

## HAPPY THANK YOU MORE PLEASE

**DIRECTED BY** *Josh Sussman* **ON TV**

Winner of the Sundance Audience Award, this will likely be the Little Miss Sunshine of this year's fest. It's a quirky New York sex-comedy directed by and starring *How I Met Your Mother*'s Josh Radnor. Supposedly like *Garden State* if it was made by a young Woody Allen.



## THOR

**WANTED BY** *Marvel Studios* **ON** May 2011

**CASTING** *Iron Man*'s take on the Marvel adaptation is set to star Natalie Portman, Anthony Hopkins, Tim Ruddy and Chris Hemsworth in the title role. Stunt Thorwald has left the cast at the last minute (but as he did when playing Asgardian in *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy).

## I SAW YOU

**WANTED BY** *Warner Bros.* **ON** May 2011

**SUSPENSE** We already have David Fincher taking on *Twilight* in *The Social Network*. Now we have *Crash* director James Franco taking on *Crash* in *I Saw You* based on Craig Hatfield's *Mixed Connections* screen, and is set to be directed by Vincenzo Natali. George Tillman Jr.

## DUNE

**WANTED BY** *Warner Bros.* **ON** June 2012

**NEWS** The director of *Heavenly Creatures* has been hired to take on the new adaptation of Frank Herbert's 1965 novel, previously made into a car crash of a film by David Lynch back in 1984.

## LA RAFFE

**WANTED BY** *Warner Bros.* **ON** June 2012

**FOOTAGE** Jean Reno and Milla Jovovich star in what is being billed as the French Schrödinger's Cat — a movie looking at French complexity in the Holocaust. A trailer (without subtitles, unfortunately) is currently doing the rounds online.

## JANE EYRE

**WANTED BY** *Warner Bros.* **ON** 2011

**SUSPENSE** Early days, but rumors have it that the Mexican was crowned behind Jim Stoenberg wants to do a Gothic adaptation of Charlotte Brontë's classic. Michael Fassbender and Mia Wasikowska (Tim Burton's *Alice*) are set to star.

## KILLING BONO

**WANTED BY** *Warner Bros.* **ON** May 2011

**NEWS** No, it's not the inevitable CIA biopic, but a very look at the band's beginnings from the perspective of a small group of musicians. Ben Barnes and Kristen Bell star. *TV's* *Breaking Bad* star in this link aside.

## SEX AND THE CITY 2

**WANTED BY** *Warner Bros.* **ON** May 2011

**FOOTAGE** In a surprising shift towards neo-realism, Carrie and the girls fall on hard times and are forced to become prostitutes in Moscow to subsidize debilitating crack habits. Nah, not kidding — it's more of the same old the.

## PARANORMAL ACTIVITY 2

**WANTED BY** *Warner Bros.* **ON** June 2011

**NEWS** The first *Paranormal Activity* was such a huge success (grossed in worldwide box office from a \$1,000 budget) that *Paranormal Activity 2* is now in their new horror franchise. This rush job sequel will be directed by Scott Stuber. Kevin Costner and released in time for Halloween.

## THE GIRL WITH THE DRAGON TATTOO

**WANTED BY** *Warner Bros.* **ON** 2011

**NEWS** Fans of Stieg Larsson's crime trilogy will be delighted to learn that Scott Peterson has optioned a film for a series of *De Vries* Code-style Hollywood adaptations. A Swedish adaptation already exists but the rights actually belong to

## SCOTT PILGRIM VS THE WORLD

**WANTED BY** *Warner Bros.* **ON** April 2011

**FOOTAGE** Early word on Edgar Wright's Hollywood debut is extremely positive, with an auspicious trailer debuting the spring ahead of an *Assault* opening. Michael Caine, Jason Schwartzman and Anna Kendrick head up the young cast. Get excited about this one.

## THE COMPANY MEN

**WANTED BY** *Warner Bros.* **ON** May 2011

**FOOTAGE** *War* Wing and *RR* producer John Wells returns the ring to the multiplex with this screenwriter-based drama starring Terence Stamp, Kevin Costner, Ben Affleck and Chris Cooper. A sequel is doing the rounds after its Sundance premiere.

## KNIGHT AND DAY

**WANTED BY** *Warner Bros.* **ON** June 2011

**FOOTAGE** Tom Cruise has a lot riding on this action thriller sort of a *Wedding Crashers* for the Bosnian generation, with Cameron Diaz as an ordinary gal kidnapped by Cruise's secret agent. The trailer looks surprisingly fun, but can the Cruise sell out it?

## BEAUTIFUL BOY

**WANTED BY** *Warner Bros.* **ON** June 2011

**NEWS** While they Michael Sherman lives he's acting — rather than his emotion — muscles as the father of an 18-year-old who commits a mass shooting at his high school. Maria Bello plays his estranged wife, with Matt Long as one of the cast members.





NEXT ISSUE

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